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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS KI SISA

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS KI SISA

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Rabbi Heschel Greenberg

212 Exeter Road

Williamsville, NY 14221

716-632-0467

716-245-9520

rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Ki Sisa* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us

prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Ki Sisa, the Rebbe taught, is a fundamental and unique parsha because it comprises all phases of Jewish History from Creation to the Geulah - the Final Redemption.

ESSAY ONE

INTOXICATED WITH LOVE

Everyone is intoxicated about something. The challenge is to know what, where, when and how to imbibe.

ESSAY ONE

INTOXICATED WITH LOVE

All Shekels were not created equal

This week's Torah portion discusses the Half-*Shekel* contribution Jews had to make upon building the Mishkan (portable sanctuary) in the desert. This obligation continued throughout the duration of the Temple in Jerusalem. Even today--with the absence of the Temple—there is a custom to give a symbolic half shekel by giving a half-dollar to charity on the day before Purim.

Our sages tell us that nothing happens by coincidence. The fact that we read about the obligation to give a half-shekel right after the holiday of Purim indicates that there is a close relationship between the two.

Indeed the Talmud (*Megillah* 13b) discusses the connection between the giving of the half-shekel

and the Holiday of Purim by first quoting the words used by the wicked Haman to King Achashveirosh:

> "If it pleases the king let it be written that they be destroyed, and I shall pay ten thousand talents of silver."(Esther 3:9)

The Talmud proceeds to quote the age, *Resh Lakish* who said:

> "It was well known beforehand to G-d that Haman would one day pay shekels for [the destruction of] Israel]. Therefore G-d anticipated his shekels with those of Israel. And so we have learnt [in the Mishnah]: 'On the first day of [the Hebrew month of] Adar a proclamation is made regarding the [giving of the] *shekalim*...'

This last statement concerning the proclamation is based on the fact that the new season for the Temple begins in the month of Nissan, the very next month following Adar. This is the simple reason why they would make the announcement in the beginning of Adar to make sure that the contributions for the Temple's functions would be given before the new season would commence.

In this passage, the Talmud suggests that there is a deeper connection between the announcement concerning the half-shekel and the month of Adar. These half-shekels that we gave actually neutralized the power of Haman's silver that he offered to the king.

The obvious question here is, how did the half-shekels the Jews gave to the Temple have the power to neutralize the money Haman offered?

A Half is Better than a Whole

The standard explanation given is that the half-shekel is a reminder that every Jew is merely a half and is incomplete without every other Jew. When Jews are united they form one impregnable force that can never be vanquished.

Haman's argument was that the Jews are a fragmented people and are thus vulnerable. This act of giving the half-shekel was a repudiation of that contention.

Truly Equal

There is yet a deeper lesson. The fact that every one of us gives equally – only one half-shekel,

no more and no less – implies that our relationship to one another transcends our value based on an external assessment. Logic dictates that each one of us possesses a different value and that we are not all equal. When we transcend logic, however, and view each other from the vantage point of the **essence** of our soul that transcends our mind, we are all indeed equal.

Intoxicated with Love

There is thus one more connection between the Half-Shekel and Purim. One of the obligations of Purim is to get intoxicated. Even those Talmudic authorities that take this statement literally agree that it contains deeper symbolic meaning as well.

Purim is when we become "intoxicated" with respect and love for one another. Even if logic dictates that the other person is inferior to us, or does not deserve to be loved, we must exhibit unconditional love to that person. This unconditional acceptance of the other Jew is based on the realization that we are utterly dependent on one another and that we are truly equal.

A person who is physically intoxicated loses his power of reason. Becoming intoxicated on Purim means, among other things, that we are to transcend the limits our mind puts on our appreciation for our fellow Jew.

Not only are we to view each and every Jew as a treasure, as the Ba'al Shem Tov stated, because that also places a finite value on him or her. Purim reveals the infinite value and quality of each and every individual.

It's in the Name

This explains the name and opening words of the Parsha, Ki Sisa. Although it is understood to mean, "When you count the children of Israel," literally, however, it means, "When you lift up the heads of the children of Israel."

In light of the above understanding of the significance of the Half-Shekel, the name Ki Sisa points to the effects of the Half-Shekel message.

When we relate to the other by transcending our appreciation for his or her external and even internal value, we lift up the "head" of the other person to a new level. The "head," metaphorically, refers to the highest and most

advanced level of a person. It represents his or her most exalted and noble qualities. BY telling us that this process of counting the Jewish people had to come through the giving of the Half-Shekel, the Torah is thereby revealing to us that we cannot be content with viewing the other as an exalted person with many "head" qualities. We must "lift up the head" and recognize that the other possesses infinite value.

Moshiach: Intoxicated with love

Our sages tell us that in the Messianic Age when all other Holidays will lose their significance, Purim's importance will not change.

A corollary of this statement is that the individual features of Purim will likewise be prominent in the Messianic Age. Among them is the idea of the half-shekel/unity and of "intoxication." The combined result is that when Moshiach comes, the Jewish people will experience an unprecedented measure of unity, to the point that we will be "intoxicated" with love for one another. Moshiach himself is often described as a leader whose obsession is the care and love for every individual.

Moshiach's passion for all will be "infectious." His passion will become our passion. His "intoxication" with love will become ours as well.

In addition, the revelation of Divine energy in the world will remove all the limits that we impose on ourselves that divide us. Purim with its message of trans-rational love and acceptance of each other will become a permanent fixture in the new world.

ESSAY TWO

NEW AND IMPROVED

Breaking something for the purpose of restoration is preferable to building something that stands to be destroyed.

ESSAY TWO

NEW AND IMPROVED

Moses was Not Impulsive

When Moses returned from Mount Sinai with the tablets in hand, the Torah recounts his reaction when he saw the Jewish people dancing before the Golden Calf they had just created:

> "And Moses became enraged, and he hurled the tablets from his hand, and shattered them at the foot of the mountain."

At first glance it would have appeared as if Moses' act was an impulsive one, prompted by his anger at and disgust with the Jewish people who acted in the most reprehensible way imaginable—idol worship just forty days after G-d Himself had told them that they should have no other gods.

In truth, our sages inform us that Moses' act was not, G-d forbid, due to uncontrollable rage, but it was sanctioned, or even mandated, by G-d. In the words of the Talmud: "Said G-d to

him, 'You did the proper thing by shattering them.'"

G-d's Endorsement of the Shattering of the Tablets

There are several reasons as to why G-d was pleased with Moses' shattering of the Tablets. One reason is based on the Talmudic teaching that the sin of the golden calf was orchestrated by G-d to teach the world the power of *Teshuvah*-repentance (Babylonian Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 4b). It was truly incredible that the Jewish nation was able to "bounce back" after this most horrendous sin. This is powerful testimony to the power of *Teshuvah*.

Who and what inspired the Jewish people to have a change of heart and to do sincere *Teshuvah*? It was Moses' act of breaking the Tablets. By showing the Jewish people that they were not worthy to receive the Tablets, they too were devastated and shattered. The breaking of the Tablets, thus, introduced the Jewish people to newer and higher dimensions of their own spiritual strength that enabled them to "bounce back" and receive the second tablets.

We can now appreciate the statement of our sages that the second tablets were "double the strength" of the first ones. How could these tablets that were hewn by Moses compare with the first ones that were completely the handiwork of G-d?

The answer is that since the shattering of the Tablets were the catalysts for the Jewish people's exponential growth through *Teshuvah*, the tablets thus represent a higher dimension of holiness as well.

We can now appreciate how Moses' shattering of the tablets was in essence a positive act.

Moses' Greatest Achievement!

A question still remains. Where does the Torah allude to the positive nature of Moses' shattering of the tablets?

According to Rashi, the very last verse of the Torah that describes the great wonders Moses performed in front of all the Jewish people, refers to his shattering of the tablets.

It is incredible that of all Moses' qualities, the Torah singles out his shattering of the Tablets as his single most significant accomplishment!

The answer lies in the cathartic and transformative power the shattering of the Tablets achieved, not to mention the way it saved the Jewish people from G-d's wrath and restored His love from them.

Climax of History turns Shattering of Tablets into a Virtue

One may raise a simple question. If the shattering of the tablets was considered by G-d to be a positive act, why is it not mentioned explicitly in the Torah in this week's Torah portion where the episode of the shattering is first mentioned? Why do we have to wait until we reach the very last verse of the Torah to discover the positive nature of this event?

The answer lies in the understanding that the closer we get to the climax of history; the more we realize the greatness of Moses' act of apparent destruction. While we are in exile and still feel the negative effects of the shattering of the tablets, we cannot readily appreciate their positive value.

Only in the "end of days," (symbolized by the "end of the Torah") during the Messianic Era, will the positive aspects of the shattering of the

Tablets become fully manifest. At that time, our sages tell us, the Fast of the Seventeenth of *Tammuz*—the anniversary of the shattering and subsequent tragedies—will be transformed into a day of festivity.

Thus, according to Rashi, G-d's endorsement of the shattering of the Tablets is enunciated in the very **last** verse of the Torah, in the context of the vision Moses was given of the "end of days."

Only then will we be able to fully see through the negative veneer of this and all other apparently negative events.

ESSAY THREE

THE GOLDEN CALF

To be sure, humility is a virtue. Following G-d's command, even if not done egoless, is the ultimate virtue.

ESSAY THREE

THE GOLDEN CALF

How can a People Stoop so Low?

Can you imagine hearing G-d telling you not to make and worship other gods and only forty days later you would actually have the temerity to do just that?

This is precisely what had occurred at Sinai, when the entire Jewish nation heard G-d personally tell them that there was to be no other gods. Yet, only forty days later, the Jewish people participated in a most despicable orgiastic rite, of dancing around the Golden Calf that emerged from the fire into which they had thrown their gold and precious jewelry! How could this have happened?

Some commentators refer to the fact that among the Jews that had left Egypt was a mixture of peoples known as the "*Eirev rav*" who joined the Jewish people when they saw the great miracles that had occurred in Egypt. Despite their willingness to become part of the

Jewish nation, they did not abandon their idolatrous ways. With the absence of Moses—who had not returned from his forty-day sojourn on Mount Sinai—they found an opportunity to introduce their old pagan ways into the Jewish community.

Other commentators explain that the Golden calf was not intended to be a replacement for G-d, but a replacement for Moses whom they feared was not going to return.

According to the Midrash, the Satan created a mirage, of Moses' coffin floating in the air, leaving the impression that Moses had died. And now that they were bereft of a leader they had to create their own leader—the golden calf.

The Three Questions

There are several obvious questions that beg to be asked.

Firstly, how could they imagine that a golden calf could take the place of a human Moses?

Secondly, why didn't they appoint other capable individuals as their leader, such as Aaron and *Chur*?

Thirdly, if, for some reason, they were deluded into thinking that a golden calf can take Moses' place, why were they punished for its creation? Why was it considered to be idolatry?

The Uniqueness of Moses

The answer lies in a better understanding of Moses' unique role and what set him apart from all other Jewish leaders and prophets.

When G-d wanted to communicate His ideas to the Jewish people, He chose Moses to be the conduit because Moses' humility guaranteed that there would be no subjective reporting of what G-d had told him. Moses was like a funnel and not like a filter. Nothing is added to or subtracted from the fluid that flows through the funnel.

By contrast, all other people, whose egos were not as suppressed as Moses, would have filtered G-d's words. Their transmission of G-d's teachings would have been colored by their subjective feelings. Consequently, the Jewish people would not have had access to G-d's pure and original message.

To "remedy" this situation, the creators of the Golden Calf reasoned, that the most ideal replacement for Moses' selflessness would be an inanimate object. Without an ego or identity of its own it could serve as non-obstructive and unobtrusive conduit for G-d's ideas. Any other representative, as great as he may be, would have compromised the integrity of G-d's message.

Only G-d can Appoint Conduits

The mistake of the Jewish people was that **only** G-d could designate someone to be His messenger. And it was G-d who designated Moses and his human successors until Moshiach, to be the conduits of G-d's teachings to the world. No physical object that **we** will designate—without G-d's approval—could represent Him.

To be sure, no other leader can be compared to Moses. But, it was G-d's will that his leadership be continued by his human successors. When the Jewish sages and leaders of every generation put aside their egos and faithfully attempt to transmit the teachings of the Torah, their words

assume the authority of G-d's teachings to the world.

Man-made creations, good intentions notwithstanding, cannot replace G-d's direct communication to us through the Torah and its teachers. Moses in his day, and all the true Jewish transmitters of Torah since, are the only legitimate conduits of G-d's directives.

"Humble Ones: the Time for Your Redemption has rrived

This unbroken chain of selfless Torah communicators in each generation will culminate with the generation of Redemption (which, the Rebbe informed us, will occur in **our** generation), headed by the ultimate representative of G-d, a leader so selfless that he will even teach Torah to Moses—our righteous Moshiach.

One of Moshiach's salient characteristics is his humility. As Moses before him, Moshiach will not impose his own subjective and ego tainted feelings on G-d's message. Moshiach's task further is to instill some of this humility to the entire Jewish people. Indeed, the Midrash, when describing Moshiach's announcement to the

world that the Time of Redemption has arrived, will preface the declaration with the words "humble ones."

ESSAY FOUR

AARON'S ROLE IN THE GOLDEN CALF

What we want the most is not necessarily what we need the most. The perfect person is one who truly knows what to want

ESSAY FOUR

AARON'S ROLE IN THE GOLDEN CALF

In the Defense of Aaron

This week's Torah portion *Ki Tisa* contains one of the most explosive narratives of the entire Torah. Aaron, the brother of Moses, G-d's chosen *Kohein Gadol* (High Priest), abets and assists in the construction of Judaism's greatest abominations—the Golden Calf!

Our commentators have grappled with this issue. How can Aaron, one of Judaism's most revered people, be involved in such a horrible crime?

The most widely known interpretation of Aaron's involvement was that he was motivated by one thing—his love and concern for the future of the Jewish people. Aaron knew that Moses' return was imminent. By acting as if he was interested in helping those who wanted another g-d, Aaron was stalling for time. Aaron's hope was that by the time any more

serious transgression would occur, Moses would have returned.

To further complicate their ability to create the golden calf, Aaron asked them to take their **wives**' jewelry. Aaron, our Sages tell us, was confident that the women would not comply with their husband's wishes to contribute their valuables for idolatrous purposes. Aaron was right, but he underestimated the zeal of the men to worship this idol. They took their **own** jewelry and quickly brought it to Aaron.

Aaron also did not resist their demands, our Sages inform us, because the feared that if he would have done so, they would have killed him. And it was not concern for his own life that prevented him from resisting, rather it was his fear that if the Jews would have been charged with murder, in addition to idol worship, G-d would not have forgiven them.

Why was Aaron Blamed?

This explanation, however, raises the opposite question. If Aaron was so innocent and his motives were so pure, why did he have to bear even part of the blame? Why did Moses rebuke

him so harshly? And why is the sin of the Golden Calf attributed to Aaron?

Harsher Treatment for the Righteous

One possible explanation is that in the end, the Jewish people suffered terribly from the entire saga. Had Aaron truly averted the catastrophe and all Jews would have been spared, Aaron would probably have been given credit for saving them. To be sure, the end result, tragically, was not what Aaron had intended. Nevertheless, his involvement was instrumental in causing harm to some Jews, even as he spared the rest of them from an even worse fate.

For a *Tzadik* (a righteous and holy person) who is consumed with a love for the Jewish people, even unintentional harm caused to only a few, leaves its mark. A *tzadik* whose devotion to the one G-d is so absolute, cannot help but to be affected adversely, when his actions lead, albeit, unintentionally, to idolatry.

Had others of lesser importance than Aaron done the same thing, it would not have diminished them. After all, they tried their best to avert a catastrophe. For a man of Aaron's

caliber, however, in spite of his innocence, he had to bear the burden of his actions.

The lesson for all of us is that the more spiritually sensitive we become, we must not be satisfied with our good intentions. We must endeavor to guarantee positive results, particularly where the welfare of the Jewish people and the integrity of G-d's unity are concerned.

The Tzadik's Stoicism

With the premise that the holier and more sensitive people are the greater the demands are made on them, we can fathom a curious phenomenon. Throughout history, the Jewish people were in dire need of salvation. Whether it was physical danger and oppression, or spiritual degradation and demoralization, the Jewish people always expressed their desire for G-d to send them Moshiach to liberate them. Yet, the people who yearned most for Moshiach were the ones who seemed to need him the least, at least from a spiritual vantage point.

The true *Tzadik* does not crave for material wealth. The *Tzadik* is known for his stoic nature. He can endure pain and can even see it

as cathartic and positive The *Tzadik* can tolerate the absence of freedom as long as it does not impinge on his observance.

The Holier People are the More they Crave for Moshiach

Yet, notwithstanding all of this, we have discovered that the greater the *Tzadik*, the greater his passion for Moshiach and the more he felt the degradation of life in exile. How do we explain this paradoxical phenomenon? While he needs it the least he wants it the most!

In light of the above analysis—that the more spiritual people are, the more they are held accountable for their actions—we can understand that the righteous feel their miniscule imperfections far more acutely than most of us feel far greater faults.

To the righteous, thus, the need for Redemption is felt more keenly. Every minute the Jewish people suffer, it is intolerable for them. Every instant that G-d is in exile is the source of incredible pain for the spiritual advanced. Despite their exemplary behavior and their efforts to help, they will implicate themselves in the failure of their actions. They yearn for a

time when their efforts and good intentions will yield only positive results and they instill some of their passion for Moshiach to the rest of us.

ESSAY FIVE

13 YOUR LUCKY NUMBER

While the number one is not thirteen, there are 13 ways that point us to one.

ESSAY FIVE

13 YOUR LUCKY NUMBER

Who knows thirteen?

Thirteen is a lucky number! At least from the Jewish point of view, thirteen is a number that is associated with a number of positive themes.

Let's begin the litany of "Jewish thirteens" with one that appears in this week's Parsha: The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy." When the Jewish people worshipped the Golden Calf thereby incurring G-d's wrath, Moses pleaded with the A-mighty to spare them. When G-d finally relented and promised Moses that He would not destroy them, He revealed to Moses the secret formula for invoking G-d's mercy. By mentioning the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, G-d would "alight" from His Throne of Justice and "sit" on His throne of Mercy.

Thus, the number thirteen is associated with Divine compassion that overrides all that is negative.

Another list of thirteen includes:

The "Thirteen Principles of Faith," enumerated by Maimonides as the foundational beliefs of Judaism.

There are also Thirteen Methods of Torah Interpretation that have been incorporated into the daily prayer book.

[There were also 13 gates in the Temple; King David fought 13 wars; the Torah commands us to love G-d in 13 places; R. *Shimon bar Yochai* hid in a cave for 13 years; there are 13 types of damages to another for which one is liable; 13 items were contributed to the building of the *Mishkan*-Tabernacle; Moses wrote 13 Torah scrolls; there are 13 Biblical musical notes; the word *brit*-covenant in reference to circumcision is used 13 times etc. etc.]

But, most people will identify with the number thirteen, because it is the age that a boy becomes an adult, a Bar Mitzvah. (If you haven't counted, we just listed 13 items that are related to the number 13!)

At this point, one is entitled to ask, why is the number thirteen so significant?

Thirteen adds up to One!

To answer this question we will introduce some Jewish numerology, known as *gematria*. Every letter of the Hebrew Alphabet is also a number. When two words share the same numerical value, it is an indication that some connection exists between the two words.

The word for "one" in Hebrew that is said in the *Shema* ("Hear Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is **one**.") is ***echad***. Numerically, the word *echad* adds up to 13!

The *Shema* is followed with the commandment to love G-d. It is no coincidence that the word for love in Hebrew is *ahavah.* This word also adds up numerically to the number 13!

One does not have to be too imaginative to understand the connection between the concept of oneness and love. Love is generated by a feeling of oneness with another and it fosters more unity. By juxtaposing the statement that G-d is one with the commandment to love G-d, the Torah teaches us that when we reflect on the oneness of G-d, we will then begin to love Him as well.

We can now understand the deeper significance of the number thirteen and why it is so special.

Thirteen connotes the idea of the unity of and love for G-d. Many of the "thirteens" that were enumerated above, reflect either the unity of G-d or/and the loving relationship we have with Him and He has for us.

When a child reaches the age of 13, Kabbalah teaches us, the child becomes aware of the Divine soul that animates him. At that point, the child is able to develop an understanding of G-d's unity and a love for Him.

Covering up the power of 13

When the Jewish people worshipped the golden calf that compromised their faith in the one G-d, their Divine soul had been so covered up that the soul's natural love for G-d was stifled.

G-d's response to them was to reveal His true unity that expressed itself through His 13 Attributes of Mercy. By revealing these 13 attributes, their soul's natural devotion to G-d's unity and love for Him, was rekindled and reinvigorated.

Thirteen potions of land in the Messianic Age

We can now also appreciate the Talmudic statement that in the Messianic Age, the Land of Israel will be divided into thirteen sections rather than the twelve into which it is presently divided.

By emphasizing the number thirteen, our Sages intended to convey that in the Messianic Age, G-d's unity will become manifest throughout the world. In the words of the prophet: In that day, "G-d will be one (*echad*=13) and His name will be one (*echad*=13)."

[By the way, when we add up the two "ones" we arrive at the number 26, which is the numerical value of G-d's essential name.]

This unity will be so pervasive that even the "land" will reflect this unity by being divided into thirteen sections.

ESSAY SIX

THIS IS NOT ONLY A TEST

It is axiomatic that G-d's knows everything about us.
Why then does he test us? He already knows the results.
The test is help us actualize our latent qualities.

ESSAY SIX

THIS IS NOT ONLY A TEST

Moses Demotion

Moses was on the mountain when he heard the dreadful information that the Jewish people had made a Golden Calf. Even before G-d tells Moses what they did, He commands him to "descend." The Talmud—cited by Rashi—comments that Moses was demoted by G-d. "Did I not bestow greatness upon you for the sake of Israel. Now that they have sinned, why do I need you?" was G-d's statement to Moses.

After G-d tells Moses what they had done—that they made a Golden Calf, worshipped it etc.—G-d then says to Moses that He wanted to destroy the Jews and then make Moses the father of a new, great nation.

Isn't it strange that just moments earlier G-d had told him that without the Jewish nation, He had "no need for him," and now G-d was telling

him that He would make him a father of a great nation?

Moses put to the Test

In truth, commentators explain, the entire dialogue between G-d and Moses was part of a test of Moses' true leadership capabilities.

That Moses was dedicated to the Jewish people is evident from the way he shepherded them from the time he was sent by G-d to speak to Pharaoh. Moses displayed incredible tolerance and patience for his oppressed brethren. But all that was before they had received the Torah, when they were chosen by G-d, uplifted and. converted into a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Now that the newly Chosen People had descended to the nadir of evil — to construct a golden calf and worship it, just forty days after hearing G-d's direct commandment to them not to worship other gods — G-d "wanted to see" if Moses would still have patience and tolerance for them. Would Moses still be able to find their redeeming value and be willing to risk his position vis-a-cis G-d for them?

For Whom was the Test?

To be sure, G-d obviously already knew what Moses' capabilities were. This test, as is true about every test that G-d administers, was not for G-d's sake. Rather it was intended to help Moses realize his latent potential.

Another reason for a test is for the benefit of others who witness the way the one tested fares. By Moses passing his test, he served as an inspiration to others to follow Moses' example.

The Plot Thickens

To further complicate the test, Moses was told that not only did they sin so egregiously, but that they actually caused Moses to be affected by their sin. Moses was told that he too had been degraded by their action. Can a leader plead innocence when his people display such contempt for G-d and His will? When Moses heard that he was to personally suffer because of the Jews' errant ways, could he still care for the Jewish people?

If this was not enough, G-d made the test for Moses even more difficult. G-d tells Moses that He was prepared to restore his position of

greatness, after destroying the cause of his decline—the Jewish nation. The test was now complete:

(a) The Jews commit the worst possible transgression

(b) Moses is profoundly impacted by their sin to the extent that he is personally told by G-d that his whole existence has become de-legitimized.

(c) Moses is "enticed" by the prospects of "rehabilitating" himself by allowing himself to become a father and leader of a new nation.

Moses Resists

What does Moses do?

Moses passed the test with flying colors. Moses does not even consider abandoning them for one instant and pleads for their forgiveness. Moreover, he puts his own life on the line for them. Moses declares to G-d: "If you do not forgive them, please, erase me from Your book," referring — as commentators state — to the "Book of Life."

To be sure, the entire episode with the Golden Calf, demonstrates the degree to which a leader

must go to care for his flock. Only those leaders who were willing to sacrifice their own fame, wealth and even their own lives, were worthy of the title leader.

The lesson for our Times

But there is also a lesson for all of us, who according to our Sages (See Tanya Chapter 42) possess a spark of Moses. The degree to which one must show tolerance, love and even self-sacrifice for another determines whether the spark of Moses within us remains a spark, or is fanned into a robust flame.

Our Sages declare that "Moses was the first redeemer and he will be the last redeemer." Commentators demonstrate that this statement was not meant literally. Moses, as a Levite cannot possibly be the Moshiach, who must be a descendent from the tribe of Judah. Rather the intent of this passage is to indicate that Moshiach must possess the qualities, if ot the soul, of Moses.

Of all the qualities with which Moses was endowed, the most dramatic one is arguably where he is willing to lay down his life and everything that is precious to him for his

people. It would follow that Moshiach too must demonstrate his unconditional love and acceptance of each and every one and his total self-sacrifice for them. And while Moses did not shirk from his responsibility to not compromise on his values and principles—indeed, he even reprimanded and punished the guilty parties—it did not detract from his uncompromising dedication to his people.

Another important lesson to derive from the above is that by emulating Moses and Moshiach, we reveal the spark of Moses and Moshiach within us. This, in turn, helps us to hasten the process of the future Redemption.

ESSAY SEVEN

THE CURE FOR INSANITY

Einstein said insanity is when you repeat the same action and expect different results.

Torah says that insanity is when you expect results that differ from your inner Divine reality.

ESSAY SEVEN

THE CURE FOR INSANITY

Moses' Strange Defense

One of Jewish history's most significant and tragic events was the creation and worshipping of a Golden Calf, just 40 short days after we received the Torah at Sinai. Because of the severity of this transgression, the Torah records G-d's threat: "I have observed this people and look! They are a stiff-necked people. Now leave Me alone, and My anger will be kindled against them and I will annihilate them."

Moses, the faithful shepherd of the Jewish people, steps in and pleads for them:

> "Why, O G-d, should Your anger be kindled against Your people... Withdraw from the heat of Your anger..."

The Torah concludes with G-d "acceding" to Moses' pleas.

Yet, in a subsequent verse, Moses returns to G-d and states:

> "Please! This people has committed a terrible sin... Now, if You forgive their sin (then well and good) but if not, please erase me from Your book, which You have written."

Why would Moses – the defender of Israel, who was prepared to be erased from G-d's book – say, "This people has committed a terrible sin?" Didn't that magnify their transgression? A defense lawyer seeks out weakness in the case of the prosecution, yet here Moses uses harsher language than G-d:

G-d uses the term "stiff-necked" and states "They have abandoned the way which I commanded them." Harsh as they are, these words sound far more benign than Moses' stark statement: "This people has committed a terrible sin."

The Irrationality of Sin

The *Or HaChaim* addresses this matter directly. His analysis of Moses' words demonstrates that

Moses' words actually constituted a highly effective defense of the sinners. The following is an adaptation of Or *HaChaim*'s approach, with additional Chassidic insights and commentary:

The Zohar wonders, how could a person who possesses a soul, a veritable part of G-d, commit a transgression? It is counterintuitive and irrational.

The answer to this vexing question is recorded in the Talmud:

> "A person does not transgress unless a spirit of foolishness enters him."

The Tanya explains that if left to simple logic and common sense, we would never do anything contrary to G-d's will. To the soul, committing even the minutest sin is tantamount to betraying one's belief in G-d. Sinning is a rejection of G-d. From the vantage point of an unobstructed soul that is impossible.

A Spirit of Foolishness

The only rationale for the irrational commission of sins is that a spirit of foolishness enters our

consciousness and convinces us that a "small" sin does not truly and seriously affect our relationship with G-d. That is a foolish, irrational conclusion.

Now, there certainly are people who have rarely or never been exposed to their own soul's G-dly energy or to G-dly lifestyles, i.e., a life of commitment to Torah and its commandments. A Jew raised in a secular environment and who has been denied the opportunity to experience G-dly light through Torah study, prayer and Mitzvah observance is understandably incapable of grasping the severity of transgression.

However, when it comes to Jews who have been exposed to and internalized the single most dramatic, unprecedented and unparalleled manifestation of G-d's presence, there is absolutely no way that he or she can be a sane human being while sinning.

Could a person, awake and with eyes wide open in broad daylight, look straight at an approaching menace and then deny that it is there? If that were to happen, how would we diagnose that individual? We would say that he or she is suffering from a delusional mental

disorder or in a debilitating state of denial or total shock.

Temporary Insanity

Let us now return to the wording of Moses' statement to G-d, focusing on the literal translation of his words:

> "Please! This people *chata* [have been deficient], *cha'ta'ah gedolah* [severely deficient]."

The Hebrew word for sin, *cheit*, does not mean "sin" in this context. Instead, it means a lack of something, a defect or deficit.

Moses was not indicting his people for their great transgression. Rather, he was defending them, asserting that the transgression was not entirely their fault. Moses asked how it was possible for a nation, so blessed with the greatest spiritual treasures, to commit such a heinous crime. How could a people, who witnessed G-d's hand splitting the Red Sea and then experienced G-d's essence as revealed at Sinai, turn against Him? How could a people so rich in blessings and miracles from G-d,

through His servant Moses, go against G-d's most essential command - not to have other gods - and so blithely repudiate everything Moses had taught them? How can a nation lifted so high fall so low?

These were the questions underlying Moses' successful defense of the Jewish nation at that time.

Moses provided the answers to these rhetorical questions himself. "G-d, please recognize that these people have lost their minds; a spirit of foolishness has entered into them and perverted their way of thinking. They can only be suffering from temporary insanity or spiritual amnesia."

G-d's Work

How could an otherwise spiritually sophisticated nation, whose hearts were purified through the Sinai experience, suddenly degenerate into utter depravity? The only possible answer is that G-d Himself caused this temporary insanity.

This approach drastically minimizes the degree of culpability of the Jewish people. It is rooted

in the Talmud, which states that the Jewish people of that generation were perfectly incapable of committing that sin. The only reason it happened was to demonstrate the power of Teshuvah. It was a profound lesson: an entire nation can be rehabilitated through repentance and return to G-d even after so precipitous a fall.

The Cure

What did the Jewish people do to atone for their temporary relapse into idolatry?

The opening statements of this week's parsha refer to their contribution of the Half-Shekel to make amends.

How could such a paltry payment atone for such a colossal sin? And if their transgression really was a symptom of temporary insanity, how would parting with a half-shekel bring them back to their senses?

An answer is given in a 20th century work, *Even Shlomo*. The Half-Shekel symbolized the half-baked mindset of the sinner. The sinner's intellectual powers had to have been severely

compromised. If not, how could they have done the most irrational thing and gone against their very source of life and sustenance? When a sinner recognizes that he or she is lacking and suffers from a spirit of foolishness, he or she starts on the way to recovery.

Galus is Insane!

Although the Jewish people suffered from this mental lapse, it was only for a short time. With their construction of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert, G-d's presence and a concomitant state of sanity were restored. This healthy state of affairs continued as long as we lived in our Holy Land and our Bais Hamikdash stood intact.

The advent of Galus-exile changed everything. One of the symptoms of exile is the loss of sanity. We may be able to function as rational beings in all other aspects, but when it comes to our spiritual lives we degenerate into this state of irrationality. We fail to see the light of Torah and Mitzvos and the harm we bring down upon ourselves by constructing our own figurative Golden Calves.

The ultimate cure for this protracted condition, of course, will come at the end of exile, with the coming of Moshiach and the rebuilding of the third and final Bais Hamikdash.

For now, we must focus on the spiritual ideal of the half-shekel. It suggests the way for us to remove the mental bloc that keeps us blind to truth and rationality.

Three Messages

The Half-Shekel is laden with symbolism. It teaches us the three important lessons that provide the cure for our Galus insanity.

First, we must recognize that we are only half of the equation. The other half is G-d. Focusing and reflecting on this enables us to feel our connection to and utter dependence on Him. The more we reflect on this, the saner we become.

Second, we must also recognize that we are both incomplete without the other. We are likened to a single body comprising disparate limbs and organs. Illness sets in, G-d forbid, when the various components of our bodies

think they are independent of each other. More severe illness occurs when the brain is not in touch with the rest of the body. A body in which all of the constituent parts work together harmoniously points to a healthy brain. Jewish unity, as reflected in the Half-Shekel, is a sign that our brain is healthy. Moreover, a healthy brain actually fosters spiritual health.

The third lesson of the Half-Shekel comes from the letters of the word *machatzis*, which means half. The central letter of this word is the *tzadik*- alluding to the righteous person. The letters closest to the *tzadik* spell the word *chai*-life, whereas the letters most distant from the *tzadik* spell *mes*-dead.

The lesson of the closeness of the word *chai* to *tzadik* is that those who try to connect to and bask in the light and warmth of the *tzadik* are fully alive. Indeed, the *tzadik* is both the head of the Jewish people and its heart. The stronger the connection between the different organs of the body to the brain and heart, the healthier we are.

This is the basis of the Chassidic tradition, rooted in the Talmud and Biblical literature, to follow a Rebbe, a spiritual master. Not only

does that closeness help us learn how best to live our lives, it connects our minds to his healthy mind. Whatever mental deficit we may have will be made whole when we are in close proximity to the mind of the *tzadik.* Our minds will be working at full capacity with the utmost clarity.

With that clarity, coupled with the preceding two lessons of the Half-Shekel (dependence on G-d and recognizing our organic unity with others), we will be fully prepared for the ultimate state of sanity.

Future Sanity

The ultimate state of sanity is when the Half Shekel dynamic will be fully implemented. That will be in the Messianic Age. What makes the Messianic Age saner is that we will then fully appreciate that we are a Half Shekel and we will be united with the other Divine half.

Moreover, we will no longer harbor the divisions that plague society. We will experience total unity.

Moreover, our connection to the ultimate *Tzadik*, Moshiach, who possesses the *Yechidah* soul; the level of the soul that is the essence of life, will usher in true and eternal life. Indeed, Moshiach will also usher in the age of *Techiyas Hameisim*, the Resurrection of the Dead. We will all enjoy that ultimate form of life because of our intimate closeness to the ultimate *Tzadik.*

ESSAY EIGHT

WHERE ARE THE SHATTERED TABLETS?

The Rebbe of Kotzk said: "There is nothing more whole than a broken heart."

Our Rebbe taught that the goal is for broken hearts becoming whole again with the "true and *complete* Redemption."

ESSAY EIGHT

WHERE ARE THE SHATTERED TABLETS?

Sharing the Same Ark

When Moses returned from Mount Sinai and saw how the Jewish people were worshipping the golden calf he took the Tablets and shattered them.

What ever happened to the broken Tablets?

The Talmud discusses their whereabouts and states that they are kept together with the second set of whole Tablets in the Ark.

(According to Maimonides, the Ark is still around today hidden in a subterranean chamber beneath the Temple mount. It follows then that the broken tablets are there as well.)

Of what import is the knowledge that the shattered Tablets are housed together with the whole Tablets?

The Talmud addresses this matter by stating,

> "Be careful to honor a scholar who forgot his learning because of infirmity, because the whole Tablets and the shattered Tablets are both in the Ark."

Reading Torah with Translation, Severing the Jugular and Honoring an Infirmed Scholar

This statement appears in the Talmud together with two other teachings of apparently totally unrelated themes that the Sage Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi imparted to his sons:

> "Complete the parsha together with the congregation reading the Hebrew text twice and the Targum (Aramaic translation) once.
>
> And be careful with the *veriden* (jugular vein or carotid arteries). [Make sure to sever them while slaughtering a chicken so the blood will drain.]"
>
> And be careful to honor a scholar who forgot his learning because of infirmity, because the whole Tablets and the shattered Tablets are both in the Ark."

These three teachings appear to be totally disjointed.

Let us try to understand the significance of these teachings and their connection to one another.

Living with the Times

We read the weekly Torah portion (known as the *parsha* or *sidra*) with its translation on a weekly basis because, as Jews, we must "live with the times." This means we must allow the timely teachings of the Torah to inform our lives on a weekly basis. Although all of the Torah is relevant to us every day of our lives, there is a need to focus on the weekly parsha for its guidance during the specific week the congregation reads it.

But, it is not enough to read the parsha once. One must read it twice. One way of explaining this is based on the fact that we tend to read things through the prism of our own minds and hearts. We color what we read by the preconceived notions we have and thereby distort the true import of the Torah. By doing so, we deny ourselves the benefit of reading the Torah portion for direction in our lives. Instead of hearing what G-d's message to us is, we hear how the Torah confirms what we think the

message ought to be. The Sages therefore admonished us to read it again to instruct us that although the first time we read it the way it appears to us, the second time we must read it from the perspective of the Author of the Torah.

Making Torah Accessible

After reading it twice to ensure that we do not distort or color the message, we must then read the translation. This requirement addresses the opposite concern that necessitated reading the Torah portion twice. Whereas reading it twice was intended to preserve the integrity of the message, reading the translation is intended to make the teachings of the Torah resonate with each and every one of us in our state of mind and being.

Now that we see the words of Torah in its pure and unadulterated Divine form we might discover that the Torah teachings are too lofty and distant from the realities of our lives. We cannot glean any practical and relevant insights that can impact our lives because we are inhabitants of a universe that is "light years" away from the Torah's source. Particularly in

the times of exile we will feel the existence of a serious dichotomy between our world and the world of Torah.

It is therefore crucial that we have a mechanism to take the pure teachings of the Torah and translate them into the realities of our physical existence. This is what the Aramaic translation (known as Targum Onkelus), as well as Rashi and other classical Jewish commentaries provide for. While they remain faithful to the original, they have the capacity to bring the message into our universe and consciousness.

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi was instructing his children to maintain this delicate balance; to maintain the integrity of Torah even as it could be made relevant to those who are down below.

Elevating! Not Slaughtering

This teaching is followed by a second one that admonishes them to make sure that the veins or arteries that contain large volumes of forbidden blood be drained after the bird is slaughtered.

To understand this process on a spiritual level, we must preface how the entire process of

Shechitah (ritual slaughter of animals and birds) is more than just killing these creatures for their consumption. It is about elevating the world in which we reside.

While Torah — especially through its official translation — is G-d given energy that flows downward to us and enters into our consciousness to make us more spiritual and Divine, the human being has to then take the world around him or her and elevate it.

If Torah is bringing G-dly knowledge down to us into our experiences, the Mitzvot we do involves taking the physical world and our experiences and bring them to closer to G-d. This we do, among others, by the process of *Shechitah*. The word *Shechitah* — while referring technically to the act of ritual slaughter — actually derives from a root that means to pull, as in pulling something to a higher place.

So Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi tells his sons that in the process of elevating the physical world and making it more spiritual one must drain the blood from it. Figuratively speaking, this means we should divest ourselves of the life and passion we invest into our physical and material

pursuits. We cannot rise upward if we are tied down.

Even the Perfect can have their Tablets Shattered

And at this point, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi imparts the third and final message to his sons:

Even if you live your life in accordance with these principles — of effectively translating the untainted and lofty teachings of Torah into our daily lives, and successfully elevating our physical existence by divesting ourselves of passion in the pursuit of materialism — we may nevertheless experience periods in which our Tablets become shattered.

Frequently, we can reach a high and then fall down thinking that we are no longer in the game. And even if we don't degenerate into shameful behavior akin to worshipping a golden calf, we nevertheless feel that much of our energy has been spent; we become a shadow of who we were, and now we feel we are left with nothing or very little.

This leads to the depressing thought: What good is it that we've achieved such progress

when it all reverts to nothing? And while it is undeniably true that a person can always turn a new leaf; it is precisely the thought of having to start anew that is so daunting and demoralizing. If only we could recapture our original youthful achievements; if only we can put the shattered Tablets back together and make them whole again.

The answer to this unsettling thought is that even if our Tablets our broken, they do not lose any of their holiness.

Similarly, when we lose some of our spiritual attainments and the energy that we invested in our early achievements in life, they did not go to waste. This is so because the Divine writ has been etched into our souls by G-d Himself. Nothing can destroy that which is an integral part of us just as no one or nothing — even the shattering of the Tablets — could diminish their holiness.

Revitalized Three Challenges

As we stand on the threshold of the Era of Redemption we discover that these three challenges assume even greater significance:

Challenge number one is to balance the reading of the Torah with its translation. Since we are still in exile, albeit at its tail end, we are still capable of experiencing darkness and decline. Moreover, we are told that before the dawn of Redemption the darkness can actually be greater.

We must, therefore, double our efforts at seeing the Torah from G-d's perspective to illuminate the darkness. And indeed, because we are on the cusp of the Messianic Age we are provided with even greater potential to see the Torah from G-d's perspective.

Simultaneously, we have the challenge of having to translate the Torah and apply it to the most dismally dark exile conditions that exist in these times. G-d indeed gives us the requisite power to succeed in this regard for it is axiomatic that G-d does not give us a challenge He does not give us the ability to meet.

Challenge number two is to drain the passion from the "other side." Because we are so close to the age concerning which it is written there will be no more impurity and evil, the forces of evil embodied within all the temptations are far greater and more potent than ever before. It

behooves us now to learn how to drain the "blood" (read: passion) for all that is incompatible with Torah.

Challenge number three is to realize that as broken as we may think we are because of the painful protracted exile we have endured, we have never lost our inherent holiness. On the contrary, every Mitzvah we did notwithstanding the pressures of society etched into our souls and bodies the G-dly energy and light that can never be erased.

In the Messianic Age, all of us — those whose Tablets were never shattered because they lived in the days of old when the Holy Temple stood and spirituality was rampant, as well as the righteous people of all times, together with the "shattered Tablets" because of the travail of exile and the many tests we did not pass — will be together in the Ark, together with our righteous Moshiach.

ESSAY NINE

REPAIRING THE SHATTERED TABLETS

Moses shattered the Tablets at the nadir of Jewish history.

That is precisely the time and place with which G-d identifies.

We can find G-d and joy even in our moments of shattered Tablets.

It is that feeling of joy that will make them whole again.

ESSAY NINE

REPAIRING THE SHATTERED TABLETS

The Sandwiched Parsha

This week's parsha is "sandwiched" in the narrative of the construction of the Mishkan. The two preceding Torah portions (Terumah and Tetzaveh) discuss the construction of the Mishkan, its vessels and the priestly garments, as do the next two Torah portions of Vayakhel and Pikudei. This configuration suggests that this week's parsha, Ki Sisa, represents the center and core of the theme of the Mishkan.

The Mishkan is arguably the single most discussed theme in the Torah. Whereas hundreds of laws are contained within one or two Torah portions, hundreds of verses are devoted to the solitary theme of the Mishkan!

Why is the Mishkan so important as to warrant such incredible attention to its every detail?

Its importance lies in the one verse the Torah uses to introduce the construction of the Mishkan:

> "Make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell within them."

This sanctuary is G-d's instrument through which He reveals Himself to each and every Jew and beyond, to the entire world. The Mishkan, the structure that channeled G-d's presence into the world, represented the ultimate purpose for which the world was created: to transform it into a dwelling place for G-d.

It is, thus, surprising to discover that the central theme of Ki Sisa is the Jewish people's greatest indiscretion! In Moses' absence — when he was on the mountain to receive the Torah — they created and worshipped a golden calf! Why would the Torah insert this tragic episode of national shame and degradation in the center of the Torah's most cherished subject, the construction of the Mishkan? Why would the most serious deviation from G-d's plan be featured as the central narrative of the Mishkan which represents the ultimate in fidelity to G-d's plan?

Furthermore, the Talmud (*Pesachim* 3a) establishes a rule concerning the Torah. The Torah avoids saying something disparagingly even about a non-kosher animal. The Talmud tells us that the Torah will often employ a euphemism to describe a negative phenomenon. And the lesson we derive from this fact, the Talmud states, is to avoid using negative language.

To be sure, when dealing with matters of Jewish law, one must be clear and unequivocal. We cannot afford to have people misunderstand the meaning of a given prohibition because the law was vague. But, whenever there is no need for a clear lesson, the Torah avoids negative language.

In light of this fact, the question arises: why would the Torah devote so much space to describing the sin of the golden calf, arguably the most negative of experiences in the Torah? Whereas some of the most important laws and narratives are condensed into but a few verses or words, the Torah devoted thirty-two verses in this week's parsha and over twenty verses in the book of Deuteronomy to this painful subject. Why pay so much attention to the small details of this horrible transgression?

Definition of Tachtonim

When the Midrash establishes that the purpose of creation is for G-d to have a Sanctuary in our world, the Midrash actually describes the location wherein G-d wants to dwell as: *tachtonim*." *Tachtonim* literally translates as "down below," referring to the lowest possible level of existence.

What can be lower than a nation who saw the greatest miracles of all times, saw and heard G-d's revelation at Mount Sinai, heard directly from G-d to not make graven images and worship them, and then, just forty short days later, creates an idol and worships it?!

The U-Turn

And it is precisely in that "location," where the Jew finds himself in lowest of places, at the very nadir of his or her life, that G-d says: "this is precisely the place in which I would like to dwell!"

When we recognize how low we have descended and begin to turn around our lives; that is what it's all about. All of existence awaits

that U-turn. Obviously, G-d does not want us to fall, but there is nothing more desirous and precious to G-d than when we bounce back from the lowest point to which we can degenerate. Finding G-d in places that appear most distant from Him is the very expression of G-d's purpose for existence.

The Talmud expresses this sentiment in yet another form:

> "The place where a *Ba'al Teshuvah* (one who returns to the right path) stands, *tzadikkim* (perfectly righteous people), cannot stand."

The *tzadik* introduces G-d into a place that has already been illuminated with G-d's light. The *Ba'al Teshuvah* introduces light into the darkest of places—into the ultimate of *tachtonim*.

Thus, the insertion of the golden calf episode, in the middle of detailed instructions about the Mishkan, was intended to underscore that G-d chooses to dwell precisely in those places where He would most likely not be found.

The Lowest and Highest Generation

The above has particular relevance to us in these last moments of living in the darkness of exile. The term *tachtonim*—the lowest place—can also be applied to the end of the exile. We are situated in this *tachtonim* of time and, in many respects, also the*tachtonim* in terms of our spiritual sophistication.

Many tend to look back nostalgically to the good old days when there was so much more light and we had so many more spiritual and G-dly people. Could G-d really have the same positive feelings for our generation that worships its own version of the golden calf? Are we not so far from G-d's purpose and plan?

The answer is an emphatic no! On the contrary!

It is precisely in our age with all of its darkness where G-d's plan is fully realized. If G-d wanted a dwelling place in the lowest and lowliest of places then it is in our day and age—the *tachtonim*—that His plan will finally be actualized. Our generation, notwithstanding all the obstacles and challenges, has responded admirably, as no generation before us.

Many Choices

Certainly, our forebears had to contend with far more persecution. Certainly, life was so much more difficult in the olden days. But for the Jew, there were few if any other choices.

Our generation, by contrast, is blessed or cursed (depending on one's vantage point) with a plethora of choices, most of which are not compatible with the Torah's view of life. The fact that so many of us have made the right choice is noble and particularly praiseworthy and earns us the right to say to G-d: "We have risen from the darkest moments of history. The Holocaust, Soviet oppression, Western assimilation etc. and we have created a dwelling place for You in the darkest of places and times. We are more than ready for Moshiach and Redemption at which time You will finally make Your presence felt in the lowest of realms. We did our part to turn things around and bring light into the darkness.

Now, we respectfully, but firmly, demand of You, to complete the task by bringing us Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

Repairing the Shattered Tablets

The above, that the Golden Calf reflects G-d's desire to dwell even, nay, especially, in the darkest of places is reflected in one of the specifics of this narrative.

When Moses was still on the mountain, G-d informed him that the Jewish nation had degenerated into idolatry by making and worshipping the Golden Calf. Moses then descended from the mountain and, when he saw how they were dancing around the golden calf, Moses threw the tablets down and shattered them.

The Jerusalem Talmud asks why, when Moses heard directly from G-d that they worshipped the golden calf, he did not react. Only after he actually witnessed their orgy did he shatter the Tablets.

The Jerusalem Talmud answers: one cannot compare hearing about something to actually personally witnessing it.

Enjoying the Sin can be Worse than the Sin Itself

Seforno provides another answer. When Moses heard that his people constructed and worshipped the Golden Calf, it did not crush him as much as when he saw they were thoroughly enjoying the orgy. To sin and express remorse for the transgression tends to temper the severity of it and is the first step in the process of Teshuvah-return.

When one not only fails to regret the lack of inner fortitude to resist temptation, but, in addition, he or she thoroughly enjoys it, it poses a major stumbling block for one's return. Guilt for making the wrong decisions in life is as important as feeling physical pain, without which one can never find a cure. Moses felt that their situation was now helpless and was therefore moved to shatter the Tablets.

In truth, the shattering of the Tablets shattered their resistance to G-d and enabled them to introduce light into their darkest moment. They did do Teshuvah. And that was precisely the way G-d demonstrated His intention to dwell even in what may appear to be the most G-d forsaken place.

Oy to Bring Moshiach

There is another lesson in the above. If enjoying the transgression caused the shattering of the Tablets, then doing a Mitzvah permeated with joy is what will restore the integrity of those Tablets.

The Rebbe revealed that we, as apeople, have accomplished all that we need to bring the Geulah. What could possibly be missing? The Rebbe provided the answer. It is pure and unmitigated joy.

If the greatest downfall of history was the Golden Calf debacle that led to the shattering of the Tablets, because they celebrated their transgression, then he most efficient way to restore the Tablets and bring atonement and perfection to the world is through true joy.

It is no surprise then hat the letters of the word Moshiach rearranged spells *Yismach*-he will rejoice or *Yisamach*-he will brings joy to others.

ESSAY TEN

FROM ROSH YESHIVAH TO REBBE

Every Jew possesses and inner light

The teachers of Torah possess an external light.

Our Rebbes/leaders radiate their inner light on their faces.

ESSAY TEN

FROM ROSH YESHIVAH TO REBBE

Moses' Radiant Face

Moses' return from his forty day stay on Mount Sinai to receive the Torah was fraught with great disappointment and grief. The Jewish people had degenerated into idol worship just forty days after they had heard G-d's direct command to them to not have other g-d's. In dismay and shock, Moses shattered the tablets.

Moses then ascended the mountain a second time to appease G-d's anger. G-d acceded to his pleas and agreed to give the Jewish people another chance. Moses thus descends to hew the sapphire stone for G-d to engrave in it a second set of Ten Commandments and then ascends for a third time. At the end of a third period of forty days Moses descended with a second set of Tablets. That day was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

In this week's parsha—which chronicles these events—we are told that when Moses

descended from the mountain with the second set tablets his face shone. The radiance that emanated from Moses' face was undoubtedly a reflection of the Divine energy that entered into him and exuded this incredible radiance.

The question has been raised, if Moses' stay on the mountain to receive the Torah was the source of his radiant face why didn't his face shine the first time he descended from the mountain with the first set of tablets?

The Light of G-d's "Hand"

Rashi, whose commentary is geared to providing us with the simple and straightforward understanding of the text, says the following; most likely in response to this question:

> "From where did Moses [now] merit these rays of splendor? Our Rabbis said: [Moses received it] from the cave, when the Holy One, blessed is He, placed His hand on his face, as it is said: "and I will cover you with My hand" (Exod. 33:22).

This is a reference to G-d's response to Moses' request, "show me Your glory." G-d

acceded to his request by covering Moses with His "hand." This G-dly revelation is what caused Moses' face to shine. This event occurred before he received the second set of tablets.

Teshuvah Power

The Rebbe (*Sefer Hasichos* 5752, volume 2, p. 433) provides a deeper explanation:

In simple terms the Rebbe explains that the second set of tablets were a product of the Teshuvah (repentance or return) of the Jewish people. The power of their Teshuvah initiative elicited a deeper and more esoteric level of Torah knowledge. This higher dimension of Torah knowledge that was revealed through Moses' was thus the source of his radiance.

From Rosh Yeshivah to Rebbe

One of the Lithuanian sages of the twentieth century, Rabbi Yoseph. B. Soloveitchik, approached this anomaly by distinguishing between the role of Moses the first time he descended with the second descent:

The first time Moshe descended from the mountain with the first tablets he descended as

a "Rosh Yeshivah-the Head of a Talmudic Academy ," i.e. a Torah scholar whose mission it is to impart the knowledge of Torah to receptive students.

The second time Moses descended from the mountain he descended as a Rebbe; a Jewish leader who puts his own life on the line for the sake of his people.

Moses, the Torah tells us, asked G-d to erase him from the Torah if He did not forgive the Jewish people for their involvement in the construction of the golden calf. This self-sacrificing leadership generated the light that shone from Moses' face!

Our Impairment

There is yet another possible way of understanding why the Torah speaks of Moses' face shining only after he descended the second time. Perhaps the first time it also shone but the people were unable to see the light because their involvement with the Golden Calf desensitized them and rendered them spiritually resistant to seeing such pristine light.

A story is told of the illustrious chasid, Reb Itche Masmid, who upon discovering that the Previous Rebbe's speech was impaired and unintelligible due to serious illness, he remarked: "**We** have becomes so desensitized that **we** cannot understand the Rebbe…"

Converting *Reish* and *Daled*

And yet another explanation based on the Chassidic work *Bnei Yissaschar*:

Moses—upon learning from G-d of the indiscretion of the Jewish nation in their construction of the Golden Calf—was told by G-d, "Descend!" Our Sages explain that G-d's order for him to descend was not just a physical order. G-d was informing him that he Moses was now diminished because of their sin. G-d gave Moses his greatness only for the sake of the people he was to lead. If they were diminished so was Moses!

As a result of this diminution his face didn't shine. However, when he brought down the second tablets that followed their Teshuvah and their return to grace, the light was restored to Moses' face as well.

Bnei Yissaschar explains that the Hebrew word for descend "*reid"* captures the essence of what occurred at that time. This word consists of the letters *reish and daled*: These two letters are quite similar in their shape but they are light years apart when they are connected to the letters *aleph* and *ches*. When we add a *reish* to these two letters the word is *acher,* which reads and means "another," as in the verse: "Do not have **another-*acher*** G-d." When we add the *daled* to the same two letters it yields the word *echad*-**one,** as in the verse, "G-d is one-***echad***." In those two verses, these two letters are actually enlarged to underscore the danger of substituting the *daled* for the *reish* or vice versa, with catastrophic results.

This is precisely what happened when they worshipped the golden calf. They took the *daled* of *echad* signifying G-d's absolute unity and converted it into the *reish* which stands for the very opposite notion of idolatry. They perverted the *daled* and *reish*—"one" became "another." Hence the word *reid* that connotes degradation consists of these two letters because it is the perversion of these two letters is the cause of degradation.

This, *Bnei Yissascher* says, is what the rabbis meant when they said "Descend from your greatness." This has a dual meaning. First it means that Moses was diminished. Second, it also can be translated as "the greatness was degraded," suggesting that the "great" or large letters of the *reish* and the *daled* that underscore the integrity of these two letters were compromised, diminished and perverted.

These two explanations are actually complementary: Moses was diminished because the people took the "great" letters of the world *reid*-the *reish* and the *daled*, reduced and confused them. It thus resulted in Moses' descent as well. His light could not be revealed.

The second set of tablets however remedied this and restored the *daled* and the *reish* to their rightful places and allowed Moses' concealed light to be fully restored; nay, to even become more powerful than before, as the Rebbe explains, because of the power of Teshuvah.

Adar and the Rectification of the Letters *Reish* and *Daled*

It is providential that this Torah portion, with the entire saga of Moses' descent, occurs in the

middle of the month of Adar. The word Adar consists of the two letters *reish* and *daled* with an *aleph*—that stands for G-d who is one—in front of those two letters.

It is no coincidence then that the two heroes of Purim are Esther and Mordechai. Esther derives from the word *hester* that means concealment and alludes to the hidden light that was caused by the spiritual degradation of the Jews at that time. They had experienced the same degeneration represented by the word *reid*-descend. Their descent was caused by their "bowing down to an icon," reminiscent of the worshipping of the golden calf.

Mordechai, whose name contains the letters *reish* and *daled* in it, was able to reverse that process of degeneration and decline. This power he possessed is alluded to by the other letters of his name: The two letters *reish* and *daled* are prefaced by the letter *mem*, which stands for Moses and Moshiach. Mordechai, the Moses and Moshiach of his generation, was able to turn the *reish* of idolatry of the Jews at that time who bowed to the icon into a *daled*, an affirmation of G-d's unity.

The other two letters of Mordechai, the *chof* and the *yud*, are an acronym for *knesses Yisroel*—the Jewish nation. Mordechai was able to reveal the hidden light of Esther—who symbolizes the Jewish people—and reverse their downward spiraling. In the words of the Megillah: The Jews had *light*, joy, happiness, and glory. All of the light that was concealed (Esther) was now fully revealed. The catalyst for this reversal was the Teshuvah of *Knesses Yisroel*-the Jewish people who were inspired by Mordechai.

Revealing the Light of Moshiach

We are living in the days of Moshiach. Moshiach's face is radiating G-dly light, but this light is unfortunately still in a state of Esther-concealment. Moshiach's role as the one who ushers in the final Redemption has yet to materialize. The world is still shrouded in darkness even as we anticipate the Redemption every day. What can we do to see his radiant face and translate that light into the end of the darkness of exile?

From all of the above explanations as to why Moses' face shone only after receiving the

second tablets it is obvious that our ability to see Moshiach's radiance is also connected to **our** efforts at Teshuvah and self-refinement.

We must strive to live an "Adar" life; a life in which our *reish* and *daled* are in the right place—preceded by the *Aleph.* It then becomes Adar, which is a composite of two words: *Aleph Dar*-the Aleph dwells, connoting that G-d who is the "*Aleph*" of the world feels comfortable dwelling in it.

Knowing that this light is here ready to be revealed it generates the joy, happiness and glory that follow the word light in the Megillah. And this joy of Adar that derives from the knowledge that G-d dwells comfortably in our midst will be the catalyst that will enable **us** to see the radiant face of Moshiach imminently!

ESSAY ELEVEN

OUR DEFENSE STRATEGY

It is easier to get out of Galus/exile than to get the Galus out of us.

Our request for Moshiach is to achieve even that.

ESSAY ELEVEN

OUR DEFENSE STRATEGY

Moses' Defense: A Prosecutor's Dream!

When Moses pleads with G-d to spare the Jewish people for having worshipped the golden calf, Moses presents several arguments in their defense, the first of which is:

> "Why, O G-d, should Your anger be kindled against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand?"

What defense of the Jewish people is Moses presenting?

Presumably, his argument is:

Why would G-d perform such miracles for a people He was going to destroy? Or why would He destroy a people in whom He had invested

so much? However, if that was a valid defense it could also be used to eliminate or forestall any and all punishment for sin. Why would G-d perform miracles for a people and then punish them?

In addition, the defense that G-d took them out with "great power and with a strong hand" could work against them. It can be presented as a strong argument to magnify their guilt. G-d could have replied to Moses, 'Look at the ungrateful nation who returned My kindness to them with unfaithfulness!' Moses' defense could have so easily buttressed the "prosecution's" case!

Passing Over Logic and Justice

We can answer this question and understand the import of Moses' defense in light of the Rebbe's analysis of the paragraph in the Haggadah which describes G-d's role in the Exodus from Egypt:

> "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt. And G-d took us out of there with a powerful hand and an outstretched arm.

> And if G-d had not taken our ancestors out of Egypt we, our children and our children's children would still be subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt."

The Rebbe cites the following question raised by commentators:

How can it be said that if G-d had not taken us out of Egypt that "we and our children and children's children would still be slaves in Egypt?" Wasn't our father Abraham told that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years? That means that after 400 years they would be free even without any special act of Divine intervention. Why then do we attribute our freedom to a special act of G-d?

The Rebbe answers that when the Jewish nation was liberated from Egypt they had not fulfilled their mission there. Their objective was to refine the world that had been tainted by the sin of Adam and Eve's partaking of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the persecution they endured, the Jewish people had so assimilated the Egyptian life style that they had become essentially indistinguishable from the Egyptians.

Logic and justice would have demanded that they remain as slaves in Egypt until such time that they succeed in achieving their goal of refinement. This means that we would have to remain in Egyptian exile until the Messianic Age. The 400 year deadline was based on the assumption and premise that they would have succeeded in refining the world. Failure to do that would seem to demand that they remain in exile indefinitely.

In order for G-d to liberate them then, He had to "pass over" and override His own attribute of justice which still demanded that they remain slaves in Egypt until "mission accomplished."

G-d did not pay any attention to the legitimate demand of strict judgment to have them remain in Egypt. Instead, G-d used His "great power and strong hand" to overrule that demand of justice, and He liberated them from Egyptian bondage prematurely despite the "objection" of His attribute of justice.

However, as a result of their premature departure they were still under the influence of the Egyptian exile. This meant that while they were physically out of Egypt, the Egyptian

mindset had not been expunged from their system.

Premature

We can now understand the import of Moses' defense of the Jewish people. By stating that G-d had liberated the Jews with "great power and with a strong hand" Moses was not attempting to underscore the great miracles that accompanied the Exodus. Rather he was suggesting that G-d could not have any real complaints against them for having regressed, considering the fact that they were taken out of Egypt prematurely by G-d's exercising "His great power and strong hand." If not for G-d's intervention at that time we would not have left Egypt, and we would have essentially assimilated totally into the Egyptian way of life.

Moses' argument thus was that their behavior was the result of G-d's having taking them out of Egypt prematurely and that they could not be held totally accountable for their misbehavior. When they left Egypt they took the Egyptian Galus mentality with them, and it was this which influenced them to stray from the

Torah. Moses thus argued successfully that under these circumstances their sin was pardonable and that they deserved to be spared.

The Second Defense

We can now understand how the next verse follows on and flows from this one. In the next verse Moses advances what seems to be a second defense of the Jewish people:

> "Why should the Egyptians say, 'He brought them out with evil intent to kill them in the mountains and to annihilate them from upon the face of the earth.'?"

The question can be raised, why would they assume that G-d took them out of Egypt to destroy them? Couldn't it be that He destroyed them because they sinned after their liberation?

However, in light of the above explanation of Moses' defense, this charge of the nation follows logically from the preceding defense of Moses. If the Jewish people were not ready to leave Egypt and required a special show of strength by G-d, why then did G-d liberate them? The answer that they might have offered could have been

that G-d liberated them not because He chose them as His nation but, on the contrary, that it was because they were so evil that they had to be separated from Egypt and destroyed.

But such an argument would have led to a terrible distortion since it really would have implied that the Jewish people were worse than the Egyptians and, thus, would have given them license to continue in their evil ways with impunity.

Our Defense: Take the Exile Out of Us!

What lesson can be derived from Moses' argument to G-d in our own day and age?

The fact that G-d accepted Moses' argument can also serve as a defense of our behavior as a people throughout our existence in exile. Exile is a stifling and debilitating experience. Exile, and the mentality it engenders, desensitizes us to everything spiritual and G-dly. G-d cannot therefore hold our inadequacies against us as long as He keeps us in exile.

To be sure, as individuals, we cannot look for excuses to justify our errant behavior. The fact

that we know that we are in exile, and that we are well aware of exile's effects on us, should motivate us to resist exile and get it out of our system. This we can do by learning about Moshiach and living our lives in consonance with Moshiach ideals. However, as a people we have a right, nay an obligation, to come before G-d and defend our/His people by citing the destructive force of exile.

And while G-d does not threaten us with annihilation as he did then—G-d forbid—we are going through an unprecedented period of spiritual devastation by virtue of the high rate of assimilation that has plagued the Jewish community in the last century, and particularly in the last few decades.

We therefore must approach G-d now as did Moses then and plead as we do in our daily prayers, "Why is He allowing us to lose so many of our brethren because of exile conditions? Bring an end to the destructive forces of exile that threaten to consume large segments of the Jewish nation." If we are guilty of creating our own "Golden Calves" it is because we are products of millennia of exile. And it is only by virtue of G-d's "great power and strong hand"

that we have survived at all. Therefore, we respectfully "demand" of G-d to take us out of exile by simultaneously taking the exile out of us and keeping the promise He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to bring us back to our land with the true and complete redemption, now!

ESSAY TWELVE

PLEASURE FROM TESHUVAH

When it comes to doing a Mitzvah take a hint.

When it comes to bringing the Geulah-Redemption we should err on the side of action.

ESSAY TWELVE

PLEASURE FROM TESHUVAH

The Golden Calf Enigma

One of the most troubling and enigmatic episodes recorded in the Torah is the saga of the Golden Calf.

Moses is away for only 40 days after ascending Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. A segment of the nation (according to our Sages it was just the *Eirav Rav*, the mixture of a multitude of nations that Moses accepted without G-d's approval, who instigated this transgression) decided that Moses was no longer going to return and there was therefore a need to create a substitute for him. Ultimately this degenerated into the creation of the Golden Calf and the worshipping of it as a pagan g-d.

G-d reported the crime to Moses when he was still on the mountain and made an ominous threat:

> "... I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. And now, desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation."

Rashi asks the question, why did G-d say, "desist from Me," when Moses had not yet responded to G-d's indictment of Israel. From what was he to desist?

Rashi's answer is that G-d was implying to Moses that the fate of the Jewish people rested in his hands. And if he would pray for them they will be spared.

Why the Hint?

One could ask, why did G-d have to hint to Moses to pray for the nation? Wouldn't Moses the "faithful shepherd" of Israel have prayed for them without G-d hinting it to him? Didn't Abraham even pray for the wicked Sodomites? Why would Moses not follow in Abraham's

footsteps? And if Moses was concerned that interceding on their behalf could have been interpreted by G-d as an act of sacrilegious chutzpah, why wasn't Abraham so concerned?

On a simple level one could suggest that while Moses was certainly prepared to pray for the Jewish people, he might have thought that the moment G-d threatened to annihilate them it would not have been an opportune time to intercede on their behalf. Our Sages (Ethics of the Fathers 4:18) instruct us: "Do not placate your fellow in the moment of his anger." The rationale for that is that attempts at assuaging anger when one is still enraged will only backfire. It can even unleash an even more stridently negative response. Moreover, Moses' intervention could have ignited G-d's anger at Moses himself.

Moses, therefore, may have reasoned that it would be preferable to wait for G-d's wrath to subside somewhat and to find a more opportune time to defend his people.

G-d therefore intimated to him that, on the contrary, it was indeed an opportune time to start the process of intervention immediately.

Moses got the hint, seized the opportunity and prayed for and saved the Jewish nation.

Why Only a Hint?

However, this raises another question: if G-d wanted him to get involved, why did He merely hint this to him? Why couldn't G-d have openly said to Moses, "Pray to Me if you want Me to withdraw My threat against them?"

The simple answer is that if G-d had told him outright to pray for the Jewish people, it would have diminished Moses' merit. By simply hinting it rather than stating it outright, it may have left a lingering doubt in Moses' mind if that was indeed G-d's intention. And, if he erred, he might have brought misfortune on himself.

Thus, G-d provided Moses with an opportunity to take this risk and demonstrate that although G-d's intentions were not clear, Moses nevertheless erred on the side of speaking out on their behalf despite the risk to his own life.

The Definition of a Chasid

The immediate lesson is that when we have a question whether we should get involved to assist a fellow Jew, we should err on the side of action.

This indeed is the Talmudic definition of a Chasid. The term Chasid is used to describe a person who takes a personal risk in order to prevent possible harm to another.

Err on the Side of Geulah

There is an added message for our generation in particular.

In the past, when Moshiach's arrival was remote, Mitzvah observance did not compare to the Mitzvos we observe as we now stand on the threshold of the Geulah Shleimah-Final and complete Redemption.

Even one Mitzvah performed in the present era can effectively change the entire world in unprecedented ways because it can be the final straw that will break the proverbial back of exile. Never before was the power of one

Mitzvah so great. And, in retrospect, never before did a solitary Mitzvah possess the power to help as many people in the most extraordinary way as it can be today whereby even one Mitzvah will bring Redemption to the entire world; thereby eliminating war, hatred, rivalry, hunger, poverty, etc. from all of society.

Consequently, when we have a question as to whether we should get involved in the performance of a Mitzvah, helping another and, particularly, efforts that are designed to hasten the Redemption, we must always err on the side of action and not on the side of caution.

[Of course, there can be halachic questions with respect to certain activities and they should be addressed to a rabbi for guidance according to clear directives of Torah.]

A Deeper Dimension

The above provides for a simple understanding of the exchange between G-d and Moses. However, there is a deeper understanding of this verse provided by the Chassidic master, Rabbi Yisroel of Kozhnitz (known as the

Kozhnitzer Maggid, a disciple of the Maggid of Mezeritch, and colleague of Rabbi Schneur Zalman, the author of the Tanya, known as the Alter Rebbe). This deeper understanding is based on his reinterpretation of what really transpired in the exchange between G-d and Moses.

This novel explanation requires a retranslation of the text, which is common in Midrashic and Chassidic literature. In Hebrew, which is the Holy Tongue, every word can have multiple translations that correspond to multiple layers of meaning.

The words "desist from Me" in Hebrew are *hanicha li.* The word *hanicha* is cognate to the word *nachas*-pleasure. Hence instead of "desist from Me" these words can be rendered, "give me *nachas*-satisfaction and pleasure."

The following words, "Let My anger flare up against them," can also be translated as: "May My anger cause them to be distressed [for their behavior, which will impel them to do Teshuvah, repent and return to G-d]."

One may add that the opening word of this verse is: "*V'atah*-And now," is an allusion to

Teshuvah, in accordance with a Midrashic statement that whenever this term is used it refers to Teshuvah. Hence, G-d was in effect stating that when the Jewish people will do Teshuvah it will [not just erase their sin, it will also] give Him pleasure.

The continuation of the verse: "*Va'achalem-a*nd I shall annihilate them," can also be interpreted, "and I shall love them, with an all-consuming love."

One may add an alternative interpretation to these final words: "And I will cause **them** [the Jewish people, who sinned with the Golden Calf] to love Me, with an all-consuming love."

Teshuvah out of Love

There are two levels of Teshuvah: One is out of fear and the other out of love. At first, G-d says that they will do Teshuvah because they will be distressed when they realize G-d's displeasure with them. However, once they do Teshuvah, out of distress, they will reach the higher level of doing Teshuvah out of love.

According to this novel interpretation, G-d's words were a "double edged sword." On the one hand, if we take the verse at face value, there was a clear threat to their existence if they would not do Teshuvah for the creation of the Golden Calf. On the other hand, if they did do Teshuvah, it would elevate their status in G-d's eyes. Rather than just following G-d's clear dictates, which elicits a measured reaction of pleasure for G-d, it would generate an unlimited flow of Divine pleasure.

G-d, in His strongest displeasure from the Jewish people in their lowest moment in history "craves" the pleasure they can give Him.

Of course, G-d does not need our efforts and does not need to have pleasure from them. G-d, however, chose to want and therefore need our Mitzvos and derive pleasure from them.

The Kozhnitzer Maggid's novel interpretation is supported by the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 4b):

> "Israel made the Golden Calf only in order to give an "opening of the mouth" (i.e., encouragement) for *Ba'alei Teshuvah* (returnees to Judaism)."

Rashi explains that those people were of strong character, and the commission of this heinous sin was totally out of character for them. They were clearly not capable of sinking so low to worship a Golden Calf; certainly not just 40 days after being told by G-d that they may not have any other g-ds.

Rather, this entire episode was "orchestrated" by G-d to demonstrate the power we have as a nation to do Teshuvah. Lest one would argue that his return will not be accepted, the story of the Golden Calf demonstrates otherwise.

Moses Elevated

Let us now return to the conclusion of the verse: "and I shall make you a great nation." What does this have to do with the pleasure caused by the Teshuvah of Israel?

When G-d first informed Moses of the transgression, He told Moses to "descend." Rashi explains this to mean that Moses was demoted by virtue of the sin of his people. With their initial level of Teshuvah (out of distress) Moses would be restored to his original position of

greatness. However, after achieving a heightened level of Teshuvah, motivated by an all-consuming love for G-d, Moses, as their leader, would be elevated to an even higher level of greatness: "I shall make you a **great** nation."

ESSAY THIRTEEN

HALF-DAY, SIX HOURS AND TEN COMMANDMENTS

There are three dynamic forces in our lives that we must learn to channel in the right direction.

They are our spirituality, our emotions and our G-dly nature. We can use these forces for both evil and good.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

HALF-DAY, SIX HOURS AND TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Half-Shekel Atonement

The central narrative of this week's parsha is the sin of the Golden Calf. However, the parsha begins with the commandment for each Jew to contribute the half-shekel as atonement for this transgression. The Torah does not always follow a chronological order. It can therefore discuss the antidote to their downfall before it discusses their transgression.

The Jerusalem Talmud discusses the reason why atonement was procured through giving a half-shekel. What was so special about this coinage that it could atone for Jewish History's most serious and enigmatic betrayal of G-d? Just 40 days after hearing G-d declare: "Do not have any other gods in My presence" they constructed and worshipped this golden calf! How could they have fallen so low?

A partial answer to this question can be found in the symbolism of the Half-Shekel. A dispute between three of the greatest Talmudic Sages concerning this matter will introduce us to three opinions on the causes of their sin and the road to their atonement.

> Rabbi Yehudah and Rabb Nechemia: One said, their sin occurred at the half point of the day (noon), they should therefore give a half-shekel.
>
> The other Sage said: Their sin occurred six hours into the day; they should therefore give a half-shekel because it consists of six *garmisan.*
>
> Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai: They violated the Ten Commandments; each and every one of them should therefore give 10 *geirah* [the Biblical equivalent of a half-shekel].

What significance can be found in the three different explanations for using a half-shekel? And aren't a half-day and six hours of the day identical?

Burnt by the Sun

Half of a day, or noon, is when the sun reaches its peak and is directly above us. The strength of the sun is a metaphor for the Divine emanations that sustain us, warm us and in which light we bask. But it could also burn us.

Indeed, the Talmud states that in the future, G-d will remove the sun from its "sheath" (perhaps it is a reference to the protective layers of the earth's atmosphere). The righteous will bask in its light and the wicked will be scorched by it.

Powerful spiritual energy can either lead one to a deeper relationship with G-d or, ironically, induce a sense of superiority, which can lead to the person's downfall. For the spiritual sophisticate, free choice is not about making a decision to do a Mitzvah or commit a crime; it is about choosing how to relate to the most potent spiritual energies. The more powerful G-d's presence is in the world at a given time, the greater the possibility that people will use that power for the very opposite.

Indeed, some of the greatest and most spiritual people fell from grace precisely because of their unalloyed spirituality. Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's

two sons, died because they were consumed by their own fiery passion.

In the First Temple era, idol worship was far more rampant than in the Second Temple era. This was true despite the fact that the Second Temple era did not possess nearly the same degree of G-dly revelation as the first. However, it is precisely for that reason that the challenge was greater. The more intense the light of the sun the more damaging it can become. One can reach the spiritual zenith and then fall into the abyss.

This, then, is the first view as to why a Half-Shekel was to be given. The Half-Shekel was our way of taking the "bull (or perhaps the calf) by its horns" and reversing the negative influence of the powerful noon-time sun, diverting it into the construction and operation of the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash. One must be on guard to channel spiritual excitement toward positive efforts; otherwise, by default, it might lead the person astray.

Mr. Perfect

The second rationale for atonement with the Half-Shekel, which consists of six *garmasin*, is to

remind us that the People chose to sin at the sixth hour.

According to the Talmudic text, *Avos d'rav Nosson*, G-d finished creating Adam on the sixth day of Creation, at the sixth hour of the day when He placed Adam's soul in him. A different version in the Talmud has Adam naming the animals in the sixth hour. These two versions complement each other. When Adam's Divine soul entered into him, he simultaneously connected with the animal kingdom. This suggests that his G-dly Soul immediately encountered resistance from his Animal Soul.

In this interpretation, the number six represents the fullness of the human condition. Chassidic thought reveals that our basic character traits are six in number. It is precisely when a person is at the peak of his or her development that he or she is most vulnerable. A person who appears to be "perfect" is as vulnerable, if not more so, as anyone else. This state of perfection is threatened by the emotions that relate to the Animal Soul. A person might not even be aware that strong positive character traits have been "hijacked" by the Animal Soul, to do its biding.

Accordingly, the proper atonement for the stumbles and failures of great achievers as they pursue self-development is the Half-Shekel. It represents channeling the six emotional traits in the right direction. Love should be directed outward; not smothered by narcissistic self-love. The trait of judgment, on the other hand, should be directed inward. Rather than judging others we should examine our own motives and behaviors. Compassion should be reserved primarily for others rather than be diverted into self-pity. The same can be said for each of the other emotional traits.

Divine Free Choice

The third view, advanced by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, is that the focus of their sin and atonement was the Ten Commandments. Just as heightened spirituality and emotional perfection can be channeled in the wrong way, so too even the Ten Commandments can be a dangerously sharp, double-edged sword.

To understand this point, we need to consider what G-d really wanted to accomplish when He declared the Ten Commandments.

Chassidic thought explains that when G-d said, "I am the L-rd your G-d...," G-d actually invested His essence into us. His power became our power. By declaring these Ten Statements, G-d was, in effect, telling us that we were given a new nature beyond that which was given to Adam at his peak.

This raises an obvious question. If at Sinai we were transformed into G-dly beings how then can we sin and do it so very soon afterwards?

The answer is that precisely because we are now endowed with a revolutionarily new G-dly power, we "share" G-d's ability to truly choose freely. After Sinai, we were dealing with a new dynamic.

The Double-Edged Sword of Sinai

Before Sinai, our nature was dictated by the degree to which we were receptive to the Divine emanations—the radiance of the sun at mid-day—or how much we worked at our own self-development (reaching the pinnacle of our development at the sixth hour when all of our emotions were at their peak performance). Prior to Sinai we had to struggle with the counterweights to the conventional measures of

good—from Above or from within. Free choice meant that we had the intellectual fortitude to know right from wrong and could analyze a situation to determine what the proper course of action should be. In other words, intellect becomes the arbiter between the twin forces that vie for dominion over us.

At Sinai, G-d allowed His Essence to become our default nature and when that happened we were given a far more powerful mode of free choice. We acquired **G-d's** ability to truly choose freely. This Divine ability can prove to be a double-edged sword. G-d is the ultimate Master of free choice; nothing can constrain Him. With access to G-d's Essence we were empowered to transcend our nature, albeit in **both** directions. On the one hand, we now have the ability to elicit this G-dly Essence to go against and even transform our base character, no matter how degenerate we may have become. The other alternative, of course, is that we can harness this G-dly Essence to stubbornly go against our G-dly nature and do what might be objectionable just because we can. Moreover, this newly acquired Ten Commandment power can keep us from returning to a higher plane, even when our Animal Soul says "enough."

The challenge of the post-Sinai era and the aftermath of the Golden Calf was thus to give our Half-Shekel, with the emphasis on its 10 *geirah* value. In so doing, we can affirm and channel our G-dly power in the direction of serving G-d even when our nature militates against it.

The Three Sophisticated Challenges

To summarize, the three lessons of the Half-Shekel relate to three challenges posed, ironically, by:

a) Heightened spiritual experiences ("half-day; peak of sunshine"),

b) Advanced level of emotional perfection ("the sixth hour") and

c) The G-dly energy that transformed us into G-dly beings (10 *geirah,* corresponding to the Ten Commandments).

These three dynamics are the hallmark of the Messianic Age. We are at a point in time when we are beginning to see the sun shining brightly above. A discerning eye can see all the miracles that have transpired in the last two decades, many of which were predicted in classical

Midrashic and Talmudic writings. But to counter heightened spirituality we are also witness to spiritual individuals straying into foreign territory.

We are also experiencing the struggle between the best and worst of traits and random acts of kindness versus random acts of violence.

Finally, we have never seen so clearly before the way people stubbornly cling to their errant ways even as they are witness to the newly acquired Divine goodness.

It is crucial that we know our strengths and understand that they can pose unprecedented challenges. We who live on the very threshold of the Messianic Age should equally appreciate the treasures we possess and the concomitant challenges they pose.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

HALF-DAY DANGER AND SALVATION

Life, as good as it is, needs clarity for it to be truly good.

Living in Galus-exile is to live without clarity.

Geulah-Redemption is to find that clarity.

ESSAY FOURTEEN
HALF-DAY DANGER AND SALVATION

Half-Shekel for Atonement

One of the most troubling events in all of Jewish history is recorded in this week's parsha, *Ki Sisa*. It is the sorry saga of the Golden Calf. In Moses' absence, combined with a miscalculation of the time he was supposed to have returned from Mount Sinai, the Jewish people constructed and worshipped a Golden Calf.

How were they possibly able to atone for this terrible transgression?

The answer is provided for in the beginning of this week's parsha: Each man should contribute a Half-Shekel.

Why a **Half**-Shekel? We can understand how giving charity can elicit G-d's compassion for us just as we have shown compassion to others. But, why should the giving of **half** of a Shekel bring about atonement for such a terrible transgression?

Several approaches have been given to explain the significance of the Half-Shekel:

One explanation is that the Half-Shekel underscores our dependence on G-d. We must always recognize that we are only a half of an entity and without G-d's intervention in our lives, the other half, we can not accomplish anything.

A similar explanation on the emphasis of the **Half**-Shekel highlights the need for Jewish unity; without support from our fellow Jews we are only half.

We also know the Talmudic tradition that the Half-Shekel was given in anticipation of Haman's decree to annihilate the Jewish people. His argument was that they are a fragmented and divisive people. The giving of the Half shekel centuries earlier dispelled that argument and demonstrated the inherent unity of the Jewish people.

However, these approaches do not directly connect the theme of half to the sin of the Golden Calf. What is the connection of a Half-Shekel to the sin of the Golden Calf?

Half-Day-Half Shekel

One approach can be found in the Midrash which states that the creation of the Golden Calf started at noon (**half** of the day), the time they had erroneously predicted that Moses should have returned. The Midrash states that because the Jewish people sinned at **half** of the day they were commanded to give a **Half** Shekel.

However this explanation seems to leave more questions open than it answers.

First, why would giving a Half Shekel possibly atone for the sin of constructing a Golden Calf?

Second, why did the Torah pick such a tangential and marginal fact, that the sin occurred at half day, to require giving only a half-shekel?

Third, why is the time they sinned important? Did it really make a difference whether they

sinned early in the morning, late at night, or at mid-day?

State of Mind

One explanation is that the half day is not only an indication of the time in which they sinned but also their state of mind.

Daylight is a metaphor for clarity. And, in our context, it is a sign of moral clarity. Sinning at half of the day means that their moral clarity was clouded.

However, this actually raises a new question. If half-day is a sign of a lack of moral clarity then why didn't it happen at night when there is no daylight whatsoever?

The question is even more significant when we consider the magnitude of the sin of the Golden Calf. It wasn't comparable to their infantile complaining about water. Here they created the very antithesis of the Second Commandant: not to have any other g-ds. It was as brazen a violation and act of unfaithfulness as one could have imagined.

How then could we call this sin just "half-day" clarity? It is the nadir of night and darkness!

In truth, Rashi quotes the Talmudic tradition that the Satan created darkness and confusion. If so, why highlight the fact that it was mid-day? We should be accentuating the fact that it was at a time shrouded in darkness and utter confusion?

How Could They Stray so Far?

To understand the dynamics of this "half-day" sin we must first understand how it was possible for the people to have sinned so egregiously just 40 days after G-d revealed Himself to each and every individual Jew? How does a person who is so flooded with G-dly daylight make a 180 degree reversal?

Imagine a normal, decent moral person suddenly having an urge to go out and kill people. That individual would have recognized that something has gone awry. Any normal person would realize that he or she is experiencing a serious brain chemical imbalance and look for help. Why didn't they look for some guidance from Aaron and Chur, the people Moses deputized to settle all their questions? Why didn't they think of consulting with them?

The truth is that they consulted with Chur but they didn't like his response. When he told them to desist from going forward with their plan they killed him. Aaron, we are told, was concerned that if he stood in their way they would kill him too, and for the sin of killing the High Priest they would never be forgiven.

So this actually magnifies the question. How could it be that they sinned so egregiously without realizing that there was something wrong with their thought patterns?

A Mirage

The answer lies in another Midrashic commentary stating that the Satan created a mirage and showed them Moses' lifeless body. When they realized that Moses was gone forever, they looked for a replacement.

They did not decide to violate G-d's commandments. On the contrary, they were convinced that they had a G-d given obligation to create a replacement for Moses. They further reasoned that the fact that Moses never returned was a sign from on High that his brand of leadership was not appropriate for this new generation. Moses, they conceded, was

great enough to lead them out of Egypt and bring them to Mount Sinai. But now, they believed, Moses had risen to a higher world and was no longer qualified to be their earthly leader.

After all, they reasoned, every generation has its own leader who is uniquely suited for that particular generation. And now, leadership appeared to have passed from Moses to a Golden Calf.

But Why a Golden Calf?

Ironically, here too, they used their belief in Divine Providence to conclude that the right replacement for Moses was a Golden Calf.

This premise is based on another Midrashic source that G-d appeared with His angels at Mt. Sinai; and prominent among the angels was the "Face of an Ox" mentioned in the Book of Yechezkal as part of G-d's Chariot. In other words, in their "half-baked" minds, G-d was showing them what to do in the absence of Moses; create a down-to-earth image and representation of the celestial Face of the Ox to guide them into the future.

In their distorted way of thinking they believed that they were actually doing the right thing,

which is why they murdered Chur. The people considered him to be a threat to what they perceived was the Divinely ordained new-world-order, with a new set of priorities.

To them, creating the Golden Calf was not an act of the night; it was daylight.

This then is the meaning of half-day. Night is a symbol of outright rebellion. Day is a symbol of total receptivity to G-d's will. However, a half-measure of day indicates doing evil under the guise that it is G-d's will.

The giving of the Half-Shekel alerts us to moral danger when we find spiritual rationalizations to our behaviors. While it seems that it is broad daylight it is actually the Satan shrouding us in darkness and confusion.

The True Nature of Half-Day

The truth is that mid-day is the point when the light of the sun is directly over us and represents it's strongest influence.

It is the time of day G-d took the Jewish people out of Egypt.

In the Messianic Age, the sin of the Golden Calf will be transformed into the powerful light of day, associated with Half-Day.

But as we stand on the threshold of that positive manifestation of the Half-Day, the challenge for us is to avoid rationalizing half-baked spiritual values.

Translating the above in contemporary terms, we must remain vigilant and dismiss any suggestion that our Moses, as well as our internal Moses, is gone and we now need a new brand of Moses; a new type of leadership that will steer us in a different direction. We must not follow the generation of the Golden Calf and convince ourselves that we must look for another force that is more in touch with the "new realities" of life.

The greatest danger occurs when we begin to rationalize these changes and try to convince ourselves that what we want is actually G-d's will.

When we dispel the notion that Moses is gone, in which ever form that takes, we are replicating the Half-Shekel, the force that gets us out of Golus, the seeds of which were planted with the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Mighty Fence

In the realm of Torah hints, half of the numerical value of the word shekel is the same as the word *ma'akeh*, a parapet, a fence built on a roof to prevent falling off. It is also the gematria of the word *adir*-mighty. This word, which is applied to G-d, is also applied to Moshiach in the book of Yirmiyahu (30: 21) as interpreted by the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b).

We prepare for the Final Redemption by recognizing the pitfalls of the half-day syndrome by building a figurative fence so that we don't fall off our high perch the way the creators of the Golden Calf did, coming off their high perch of Sinai. In doing so, we will be ready for the time when G-d, the Adir-Mighty One, will be fully revealed in this month of Adar, which is related to the word Adir, through the leadership of Moshiach, who is also called Adir.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

A TALE OF TWO SETS OF TABLETS

It is almost an article of faith that natural is superior to man-made because it is G-d's handiwork.

Judaism disagrees with the premise that there is anything that is not a Divine product.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

A TALE OF TWO SETS OF TABLETS

The Difference Between the Two Sets

This week's parsha – Ki Sisa – discusses the way Moses shattered the Two Tablets he received from G-d when he came down the mountain and saw how the people degenerated into idol worship. Moses ascended Mount Sinai once again to procure G-d's forgiveness.

After G-d acceded to Moses' request, He asked Moses to hew a new set of Tablets from the mountain in which G-d etched the Ten Commandments. This second set of Tablets was finally brought down by Moses and given to the people on the day of Yom Kippur.

There were two salient differences between the two sets of Tablets. The first difference is that the first Tablets were shattered, whereas the second set are intact to this day.

According to Maimonides (based on the Talmud) the Tablets are contained within the Ark which has been hidden in a subterranean chamber beneath the Temple in Jerusalem. And although the first set of Tablets that were shattered were always kept in the Ark together with the second set, they were nevertheless not functional as the second set. One could not read the words on them.

A second difference between the two sets of Tablets is that the first set was entirely the handiwork of G-d. G-d not only engraved the words of the Ten Commandments in the stone, He actually provided the stone as well. The stone for the second set, however, was hewn and supplied by Moses. G-d then etched the Ten Commandments into the stone provided by Moses.

The Connection

On the surface, these two differences are not connected. If anything, they appear antithetical. It would have seemed that the first Tablets that were entirely the creation of G-d and were therefore holier, should have endured, whereas the handiwork of Moses should have been more

vulnerable. Yet, the opposite was true. Precisely the Second Tablets, which were contributed by Moses, would remain intact, while the holier First Tablets were shattered. How do we explain this anomaly?

Natural Versus Man-Made

In truth, the reason the Second Tablets endured is precisely because Moses had a share in their making. And this leads us to a point that goes against the popular way of viewing the difference between the so-called "man-made" products and those that we refer to as "natural."

It is almost axiomatic in many ideological circles that anything that is natural is good because it represents G-d's handiwork, whereas the things that were produced by humans are, by definition, defective.

At first glance, this analysis holds water since we know that G-d is perfect and man is inherently flawed. When flawed humans take a creation of G-d and alter it, they have the capacity to taint that product. At the very least, humans will compromise some of nature's intrinsic beauty, sanctity and integrity.

And while this distinction between G-d's creations and ours is valid in some areas of life—we do indeed have the capacity to mess up G-d's world—it is a distinction, when applied universally, that Judaism fundamentally rejects on several grounds.

Rejecting the Unqualified Preference for the Natural

First, the distinction between natural and man-made is an artificial one. The same G-d that created natural products also created the human brain and the ingenuity to alter nature. One cannot postulate that an herb is more G-dly than a synthetic chemical.

Whether one should use a natural medication or a synthetic one, for example, lies solely on the results they will yield. If the natural one does a better job of treating the illness with fewer risks and side-effects, then, of course, one should prefer the natural one. But, if the synthetic one proves to be more effective, it is not a repudiation of G-d's handiwork to prefer that which was synthesized by humans, for the human being and his or her knowledge is also a creation of G-d.

G-d Created for Us to Perfect

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the debate of natural versus man-made hinges on what man does with the natural.

When the Torah records the story of creation in the beginning of Genesis it sums it up with the following words that have been incorporated into the Friday night Kiddush service with which we usher in the Sabbath:

> "And G-d blessed the seventh day, and hallowed it; because in it He rested from all His work which G-d in creating had made."

The final words of this verse are problematic. It could have just stated: "He rested from all His work that He created."

Chassidic thought cites a more profound understanding of this verse that is also more consistent with its literal meaning: "In it He rested from all His work that G-d created for us to perfect."

In this verse lies the Torah's philosophy concerning the interplay between the G-d created natural universe and the role of humans:

G-d deliberately created a world that is lacking perfection. And the definition of "lacking perfection" ranges from things that are downright harmful such as poisons and destructive natural forces to things such as diamonds that are exquisite in their beauty, but need human hands to extract them, cut them, polish them etc., so that their intrinsic beauty can be seen and enjoyed by all.

Why did G-d create an imperfect world? Because He wanted us to lend our G-d given talents to make the world a perfect world. But He also gave us free choice to either fulfill our mission or ignore it, and even worse, to corrupt the world.

Thus, when we live up to G-d's expectation of us and make the right choice by contributing our own ingenuity to making the world a more G-dly place, thereby perfecting G-d's handiwork, as it were, we endow the world with even more G-dly energy than it possessed previously.

The Preeminence of Moses'; Tablets Over G-d's!

We can now understand why "Moses' Tablets" endured while G-d's were shattered.

Precisely because the Tablets Moses hewed from the mountain represented the fusion of Moses' positive efforts with G-d's words, his work represented, in many ways, a superior Divine product than the Tablets in which there was no human participation.

Moreover, it was not just Moses' physical efforts at hewing the stone from the quarry that we are discussing. Moses expended much physical, emotional and spiritual energy (by praying to G-d for forty days and nights, offering his own life, etc.) in getting G-d to agree to forgive the Jews and give them a second set of Tablets. All of these self-sacrificing efforts contributed a higher dimension of G-dly, and endowed the Tablets with a greater power of endurance than the Tablets that were entirely G-d's handiwork.

Who Brings Redemption G-d or Us?

The application of this thought to our lives in this day and age relates to our role in bringing about the Messianic Age.

For thousands of years we are waiting for the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption from exile. Besides the benefits of peace and prosperity the Messianic Age will

usher in, the most important aspect of this glorious age is that it will reveal unprecedented dimensions of G-dly light.

What is it that will introduce this incredible revelation of G-dly light that was not present even when the world was created?

It is the cumulative effects of the good deeds of human beings that can and will generate a more sublime and permanent revelation of Divine energy. Only human action when it is fused with G-d's words etched into it—akin to the Second Tablets—can contribute such Divine power and light.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE NOT SO NEW AND IMPROVED COVENANT

G-d has given us three keys to unlock His love for us and our love for Him.

They are Torah-Mitzvos, Teshuvah and Prayer

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE NOT SO NEW AND IMPROVED COVENANT

Why a New Covenant?

After the Jewish nation is chastised for creating and worshipping the Golden Calf, G-d declares to Moses: "Behold I will make a covenant…" With these words, G-d made a covenant with the Jewish people as His way of promising to maintain a special relationship with them.

The question is asked, why was a covenant necessary? Wouldn't G-d's word suffice? And if a covenant was indeed necessary, didn't G-d already make a covenant with Abraham? Why was an additional covenant necessary?

In Biblical times, a covenant involved taking something and cutting it in half. The two parties to the covenant then walk through the two halves as a way of affirming that their relationship is akin to two halves of one whole. Thus, when G-d made a covenant with

Abraham He was affirming the organic relationship that would exist between G-d and Abraham's descendants—the Jewish people.

Two Kinds of Covenants

However, there are two forms of covenants. There is a covenant that involves certain commitments on the part of both parties to the covenant. When one of the parties does not live up to those commitments, the covenant is thus terminated.

This conditional covenant was seriously challenged when the Jewish people worshipped the Golden Calf. That flagrant demonstration of infidelity sufficed to sever the ties that were instituted at the covenant in the days of Abraham and reinforced at Mount Sinai.

Now, G-d introduced a new covenant, one that would indicate that G-d and Israel were indeed inseparable. Even after sinning, their connection to G-d would remain intact. Nothing could separate them from G-d.

Half-Shekel for a Whole Relationship

This also explains why the Jews were told to contribute a half-shekel after they worshipped the golden calf. It was G-d's way of stating that He and they were still two halves of one whole. "A Jew," the Talmud states, "even if he sins is still a Jew."

Why Bother?

But, at this point the next question begs to be asked. If we enjoy this close and organic relationship with G-d even if we flout His commandments, why bother?

What is the point of a Jew observing the commandments, if G-d's covenant and love extends even to those who do not observe them?

There are two ways of answering this question.

First, when a child knows that his parent will accept him or her even if he or she does not obey their wishes, would a sensible and loving child want to hurt his parents? Precisely because we know how much they love us—to the point that even if we disobey them they will never reject us—that knowledge itself impels

the child to do everything to make his or her parent happy.

Three keys to Unlocking G-d's Love

Second, while it is true that G-d's love for us is so great that it transcends our faithfulness to Him, yet, this love can be concealed. What is necessary to help us reveal this powerful love? The answer is: the study of Torah and the observance of its commandments. Thus, when a Jew does not fulfill them, the essential and unconditional love that G-d has for us will remain dormant.

The observance of the Mitzvot is the key to unlock that hidden love.

Another key to the unlocking of G-d's essential and hidden love for us is Teshuvah, true and sincere repentance and return to G-d's ways.

A third key to revealing this love is through prayer and invocation of the Thirteen Divine Attributes of Mercy as Moses did in the aftermath of the Golden-Calf debacle.

Mitzvah observance connects us to G-d's will, the source of the commandments.

Teshuvah, connects us to G-d, the Master of His will, who wills the commandments. One can faithfully execute the will of another and not be connected to the other. Teshuvah cements our relationship with G-d Himself.

And the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy connect us to the aspect of G-d which transcends even the parameters of His will and His role as the Master of Will.

The Rusty Keys of Galus

But as long as we are in Galus-exile, all of our efforts at revealing this essential bond cannot be fully successful. Our Mitzvah observance at its best is lacking because of exile conditions; our Teshuvah and prayer lacks intensity because of exile's effect of clouding and occluding our emotions.

One of the major accomplishments of the Messianic Age will be the full exposure of the essential bond that exists between G-d and us. To facilitate that process, we must incorporate all three keys: observance of Mitzvos, Teshuvah and prayer.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR POWER

All it takes is one outsider to do one act to change the world for good.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOUR POWER

How Could They?

One of the classic questions that are raised by virtually every Biblical commentator, as well as by every thinking person, how could the Jews— just forty days after they had been told directly by G-d not to make or worship any other gods— construct and worship the golden calf, as recounted in this week's parsha.

Most commentators assert that:

a) Only a small minority of Jews were actually involved in the most blatant display of pagan worship. The others were only guilty of being passive onlookers who did nothing to stop the madness. Proof of this is adduced from the fact that only a fraction of the community was punished.

b) The small group of instigators was actually from the "*Erev Rav,"* a mixture of peoples, "outsiders", whom Moses had accepted as

members of the Jewish nation after they saw the miracles in Egypt. These individuals were steeped in idolatry and took advantage of Moses' absence to agitate for its revival.

The fact that G-d told Moses That it was "**His"** nation that had become corrupted is cited in support of this interpretation, because Moses was the one who accepted them into the fold without G-d's blessing.

c) What began as a non-idolatrous desire on their part to create some symbolic representation of **Moses** (not G-d) quickly degenerated into blatant idol worship.

When Moses did not return from the mountain that he was on for forty days and nights, they thought he was gone forever. They, therefore, wished to have some physical representation of **him**.

In their minds, G-d did not need a human leader, He could communicate with them through a statue. Indeed, some believed that a inanimate medium was superior to a human intermediary since it cannot alter or distort the message.

Their mistake was that only G-d can decide who will be His "spokesman."

Even a Cat can Spoil Things

The lesson to be derived from these three points is that a few misguided individuals, even if they are essentially outsiders, can cause irreparable harm to the rest of the community, and that there is a "slippery slope" that can follow even a minor deviation from the trodden path set forth by G-d. Once a few individuals, albeit outsiders and inexperienced, begin to veer off course, they can lead the multitudes down a slippery slope into the abyss. This is akin to the Yiddish folk-saying that "even a cat can spoil things."

Our Sages, however, have taught us that whatever power there exists in the realm of evil, there is equal, if not far greater, power in the realm of goodness. If this is true, then it also follows logically that the three foregoing features of evil that were evident in the Golden-Calf saga are even more pronounced in the realm of goodness.

Furthermore, recognition of these three traits is imperative for us to be able to overcome the daunting challenges that we are confronted with in our generation.

What can We Do?

When we reflect on the amount of negativity there is in the world, we often respond with the refrain, "What can we do? Or, "We are only a minority pitted against a formidable foe?" Besides being a statistical minority, those who are on the right side of morality and goodness are often outside the power structure. And even if we can makes some difference, we will counter the suggestion that we do something with the argument that "whatever we do will be so insignificant in comparison with the powerful forces and accomplishments of our adversaries."

The story of the Golden Calf, as understood by our Biblical commentators, can serve as a response to these three challenges:

Even a few individual outsiders, who have their minds set on changing the course of the community or the world, can affect the outcome for everyone. And no matter how minor their contribution appears to be at the outset, it will eventually snowball into a massive force for change.

Just One Act!

As has been stated on numerous occasions, the greatest Jewish teachers of the last century, based on classical Jewish teaching, have informed us that we are living in momentous times. To some it might seem that we are situated on the precipice of history, all it takes is for one madman or arch terrorist to ignite such a conflagration that it could lead to the end of the way of life we know it.

We know that while we must always be vigilant and not just rely on faith, we are actually living on the threshold of a new and positive era, referred to in our tradition as the Age of Redemption, or the Messianic Era.

The fact that we see how evil individuals outside the power grid of society are able to call the shots for the rest of society is certainly cause for concern, but it is also a sign to us that we can make a difference; that one or several individuals can and will perform the final act of goodness and kindness that will spark a revolution for goodness that will defeat the forces of evil, once and for all.

The story of the Golden-Calf need not be depressing and negative, it can serve to inspire

us to look inside and realize the enormous powers we were given to usher in the age of Moshiach.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TWIN COMPASSION

G-d's compassion extends to allowing us to get credit for the good we do with His help.

While it is G-d who will bring Moshiach, He gives us all the credit for every Mitzvah we do.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TWIN COMPASSION

Before and After

When the Israelites constructed and worshipped a golden calf, it obviously provoked the ire of G-d Who threatened to annihilate them. Moses interceded on their behalf and "persuaded" G-d to forgive them.

In response to Moses' pleas, G-d taught Moses the secret to arouse Divine mercy in similar times of need. By reciting the "Thirteen Attributes of Mercy" the A-mighty will arise from His Throne of Justice and sit on His throne of Mercy.

These Thirteen Attributes begin with the repetitive mention of the name of G-d that connotes mercy: "G-d, G-d.." The Talmud interprets this repetition as a reference to the two occasions when we are in need of G-d's compassion: "Once before the sin and once after

the sin."

Commentators ask why we need compassion before we sin. Isn't compassion something we need after sinning? What is its role before the sin?

Simply put, we need G-d's assistance not only after we've erred to help us get back on track and to absolve us of our past misdeeds. We are equally in need of His benevolence before we've strayed, to keep us from straying. This is especially true for those who live in an environment that is hostile to the ways of the Torah. The peer pressure and the temptations that abound would have swept most people off their feet and brought them down without G-d's special blessing and assistance.

The question, however, still remains. No one would argue that we are in need of G-d's help wherever and whenever we are. Just to cross the street safely depends on G-d seeing to it that no mishap occurs. Being in the right place at the right time is not coincidental. It is part of a Divinely orchestrated plan.

Compassion versus Generosity

But this is not the point. There is a difference between Divine generosity and Divine compassion. Kindness and generosity are expressions of G-d's attribute of *chesed*, kindness, which precedes His attribute of judgment. Compassion, by contrast, is the attribute that follows His judgment. Compassion is invoked when G-d's judgment has already been activated and one is in need of an extraordinary power to ameliorate G-d's harsh judgment that one's behavior has provoked.

The original question thus remains: Why do we need G-d's **compassion** and **mercy** before we sin? While we need his blessings and kindness at all times, particularly, when we are weak and vulnerable, why would we be in need of compassion, which is G-d's "override" mode — where He overrides His sense of justice — before there is anything to override?

G-d's Role in Sin

One answer to this question has been provided by , Rabbi Meir, the son of one of the great Chassidic masters R. Levi Yitzchak of

Berditchev, in his work *Keser Torah*. What follows is an adaptation of his explanation:

When a person sins, and G-d's attribute of mercy is invoked, the sin is neutralized because as the Talmud states, G-d Himself takes responsibility for having created the evil impulse. Invoking G-d's mercy actually means that He acknowledges His own role in the commission of the sin.

True, G-d also gives us the ability to resist temptation and therefore His attribute of justice demands retribution for the transgression. His attribute of mercy, however, puts the onus on G-d and His creating of the evil impulse and the multitude of obstacles that "make" us sin.

If G-d is implicated in our sins, which ameliorates our guilt after the sin, then G-d should also be credited with our resistance to sin. How then can we take any credit for our not sinning? Is it not G-d's energy that provides us with the ability to resist sinning? If G-d takes responsibility for our sins — getting us off the hook, so to speak — why could He not also claim responsibility for our positive record before we sin? It is not we that are righteous. Why then should we get any credit for it?

This is where there is a different kind of Divine mercy. G-d is so compassionate that He gives us total credit for the good we do, notwithstanding the major role He plays in those decisions, and despite the fact that He also assumes full responsibility for our sins after we sin (provided of course, we invoke this attribute in the process of our repentance).

In both situations, G-d overrides all the roadblocks to our spiritual growth, including the following psychological ones that come both before and after we sin:

Before we sin, we might feel that we've accomplished nothing because it is not our actions, but G-d's, that keep us straight. Why then should we "push" ourselves? After we sin, we might assume full responsibility for our sins and not be capable of getting back on track; why should we try to change, it's useless?

G-d's dual attribute of mercy dictates otherwise: He gives us full credit for all the good we do, and takes full responsibility for the evil once we own up to the fact that we've sinned.

Application to Moshiach

We can apply this lesson to the efforts we have done to bring Moshiach. One might have thought, who are we to bring Moshiach? Even our positive deeds are not truly our own accomplishments, but the product of G-d putting us in the right home with the best of teachers and peers, not to speak of G-d's blessings that accompany us all the time. Our sins, we might think, are truly our own.

The twin mention of G-d's compassion — before and after the sin — dispels any such pessimistic self-analysis. On the contrary, we have the right to claim full credit for our positive actions while G-d will take the responsibility for the negative. We deserve Moshiach!

ESSAY NINETEEN

MOSES THE LAWYER

We are all teachers and transmitters of knowledge.

We must take responsibility for their failures as well as for their successes.

ESSAY NINETEEN

MOSES THE LAWYER

Defending the Golden Calf

Moses, the faithful leader of the Jewish people, was devastated when he was told by G-d that his people have worshipped the Golden Calf. When G-d told him that He wanted to destroy them because they had worshipped another G-d, Moses began to plead on their behalf.

In addition to prayer, the Midrash relates, Moses actually acted as a good defense lawyer and argued with G-d about the guilt of the Jewish people on a "technicality."

The crime that they were charged with was idolatry. The prohibition against idolatry was, of course, taken from the first two of the Ten Commandments, where G-d declared, "I am the L-rd your G-d, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, followed by: "You shall have no other gods in My presence..."

Moses "legalistic" argument, our Sages tell us, was that these commandments were phrased in the singular form: For example, if G-d was making it clear that He was addressing all of the Jewish people, He should have stated, "*Lo yihyueh* ***lachem***," You (plural) shall not have any other gods." The Hebrew word *lecha*, means "you" in the singular form.

Thus, Moses argued that, in fact, the commandments were only clearly addressed to Moses. How can G-d then hold the entire Jewish nation responsible for something they had not been commanded to follow?

Commandments Only to Moses?

At first glance this Midrash is difficult to understand. How could Moses have thought that G-d spoke only to him? The fact that G-d used the singular form can be understood in the sense that He was referring to the Jewish people as a whole. It is not uncommon to find an entire group referred to in the singular. Thus, Moses entire defense was based on a shaky premise, it would seem.

And second, wasn't it obvious that G-d wanted all of Israel to hear these commandments? So

even if the language wasn't so clear that He was addressing every individual, wasn't that the context of these commandments?

Moses the Intermediary

In truth, the fact that G-d gave the Torah through Moses begs a question, the answer to which, will shed light on Moses' "defense" strategy. Couldn't G-d have revealed these teachings directly to all of Israel? Why did He need an intermediary?

One answer to this question is that were G-d to have miraculously implanted the Torah in our minds, regardless of our mental and spiritual capacities, the Torah would never have become **our** Torah.

To bring the Torah down to our level, there had to be a hierarchy of sorts. Moses, the greatest intellect and spiritual giant was able to receive the Torah on his level, which, in turn, he transmitted to the next level so that they could comprehend it and absorb it and then pass it on to the next level or generation.

This process guaranteed that:

(a) Every Jew who studies Torah from a worthy

teacher will have the benefit of having been linked to an earlier and higher generation (in terms of its proximity to the initial revelation at Sinai).

(b) Every Jew will receive the Torah on his or her level and not be overwhelmed by it, as he or she would have been had it been revealed to us spontaneously, indiscriminately and miraculously.

(c) Every Jew knows that it is his obligation to pass the Torah on to others, on **their** level, so that they are completely receptive to it.

We can now appreciate why G-d did, in fact, transmit the Torah to Moses specifically, though He meant everyone. G-d wanted the Torah to reach and resonate within every Jew, by making the Torah relevant to each and every Jew individually. This He accomplished by transmitting it through Moses.

Didn't Filter Down

Thus, when Moses wished to defend the Jewish people's worshipping of the Golden Calf, Moses argument was that the Torah was given to him specifically. By this he meant that the Torah did

not yet filter down from him to the level of the people. Immediately after G-d spoke the Ten Commandments, Moses went up onto the mountain for forty days and forty nights. Moses did not have the time to bring the message down to their level. And while they also heard the commandments not to worship idols, they had not yet fully absorbed their true meaning and could not yet be held responsible for violating it.

The Graduation

The process of "bringing" the Torah to the level of each and every Jew is one that started at Sinai, but has not ended yet. The "graduation," i.e., the point at which we will have fully internalized all of the Torah, will occur with the coming of Moshiach. While there will never be another revelation at Sinai, the full import of Sinai will become evident to every Jew in the future Messianic Age.

To prepare for this time, it is our obligation to serve as the next link in the chain of Torah; that brings its message to yet another generation of Jew, so that the Torah will not remain foreign to any Jew.

Audio Visual Torah

We are told that in the Messianic Age, Moshiach wil teach Torah to all of the Jewish people, from Moses down to the simplest Jew and all will be exposed to the same Torah because Torah will be taught visually rather than through audio.

The difference between audio and visual is that when we hear a lecture, we can only hear one part at a time and the listener has to reconstruct all of the details in his mind. And since it is based on our ability to hear and grasp the spoken word, everyone absorbs the information in different ways.

When we show a group of people a scene, everyone from the greatest scholar to the simplest person, sees the entire picture. And while the scholar might have to enlighten the simple person about the nature of the scene, the impact of the visual is received by everyone equally.

ESSAY TWENTY

INK ON MOSES' FACE

When our words are only skin deep, they are black ink.

When our words contain many layers of meaning, these words are sources of light.

ESSAY TWENTY

INK ON MOSES' FACE

G-d's Love for Moses

When Moses descended from the mountain his face shone. However, the Torah in this week's Parsha states, "He did not know that his face shone."

The Midrash comments,

> "What was the source of his radiant face? It was from the leftover ink of his quill."

Obviously, these enigmatic Midrashic words are to be understood metaphorically. It does not mean literally that he took some left over ink and coated his face with it. What does this mean and what is the message that we can learn from this phenomenon?

According to one commentator, the extra ink came from his writing of the first word of the Book of Leviticus—*Vayikra.* The word *Vayikra,* translates as "and He called," and it refers to the

unique relationship G-d had with Moses. Before G-d would speak to him, as opposed to other prophets, He would call him as a sign of love and affection.

Moses Declined the Honor

When Moses was told to write this word, he demurred. "How can I write an expression that singles me out for special praise?" Moses' humility made it very difficult for him to write a word that accorded him, what he thought was inordinate honor. Moses, therefore, wanted to leave out the letter *aleph* of the word *Vayikra,* which would then read *Vayikar,* and would translate as "G-d chanced upon him," implying that the relationship between him and G-d was not a very close and warm one. G-d did not show him any affection, but happened to just meet him in a chance meeting, but made no effort to call out to him as the word *Vayikra* would have indicated.

Indeed, when G-d communicates with the heathen prophet Bilam, He uses the term *Vayikar,* "And He chanced." G-d's communication with him was not one that G-d cherished. It was not out of friendship and

intimacy but one of distance. It was like a meeting with some underworld character which you don't want to publicize.

With Moses, the communication was one of love and intimacy. And Moses did not want to highlight his extraordinary love G-d had for him in particular and wanted to delete the aleph so it would read *Vayikar.*

G-d, did not agree to this change and overrode Moses' editorial preference. Instead, a "compromise" of sorts was reached. Moses would write the letter *aleph* at the end of the word as G-d wanted, but he would write the *aleph* in miniature form to leave room for the less complimentary reading of the word, to accommodate Moses' humble desire as well.

Left Over Ink

As a result, there was extra ink left in Moses' quill. Originally he filled his quill with enough ink to write the *alpeh* in its full size and shape. When G-d agreed to have him write it in miniature form, some of the ink was left unused. What happened to this ink? It made Moses face shine. His humility was so profound that it made him that much more receptive to

the Divine light, and this light literally radiated from his face. Hence, it could be said that the extra ink generated the radiance from his face.

Three Forms of Writing

Another interpretation that has been offered is that there are three types of writing.

One category is the writer who has an idea and writes a book that embellishes the idea. The very same idea could have been captured in a much shorter book. Indeed, one chapter, paragraph or even sentence might have sufficed. But, literature very often is about embellishing an idea; where the idea is concealed in the abundance of verbiage and flowery language. Frequently, people miss the entire idea, not because it is so profound, but because it has been so adulterated by the excessive words.

Metaphorically, one would refer to this type of writing as one in which there is an actual shortage of ink. There is nothing with which to complete writing about the idea, because all of the writing was wasted on the embellishment. It goes without saying that there is no ink left to write more ideas of real substance.

A second form of writing is where the ink has all been exhausted in order to fully capture the core idea without compromising it in any way. No ink is wasted, but there is also no extra ink either. For all of it was used to capture the full depth of the idea.

There is also a third and totally different style where not only are the core ideas actually committed to writing, and there is no embellishment or unnecessary flowery language, but, moreover, one cannot even use all the ink to write about the core idea, because there are dimensions of the idea that are beyond being captured in writing. The deeper part of the idea will always remain with the writer.

Whatever Moses put into writing could not reveal the true inner depth of Moses' comprehension of Torah. Something was always left out from the written version of the Torah, but remained etched into Moses mind, heart and soul. This hidden wisdom that Moses possessed — represented, metaphorically, by the ink left in his pen — radiated from his face, as the verse states, "The wisdom of a person illuminates his face." From this hidden knowledge came the radiance of his face.

This hidden knowledge that cannot be found in the written word of the Torah will all be revealed in the days of Moshiach. When the prophet Isaiah refers to the new Torah that will be revealed in the Messianic Age, he was not referring to any new laws that were not given at Sinai. Rather he was referring to the hidden teachings that radiated from Moses face that will ultimately be revealed to all.

The Messianic Age will bring about the light that radiated from Moses' face and will radiate from all of our faces.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

DON'T CONFUSE THE *DALED* AND THE *REISH*

The difference between good and evil may be a hairbreadth.

One hairbreadth of a distortion can bring destruction.

And one hairbreadth of good can bring salvation!

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

DON'T CONFUSE THE *DALED* AND THE *REISH*

Moses' Demoted

The single most serious setback for the Jewish people was arguably the sin of the Golden Calf. Just forty days after Moses ascended onto Mount Sinai to bring back the "published" edition of the Ten Commandments which highlighted the commandment to not have any other gods they created and worshipped a golden calf.

Even when Moses was on the mountain he was told by G-d that his people had degenerated into idol worship. G-d thus instructs Moses,

> "Go down, for your people that you have brought up from the land of Egypt have become corrupt."

What did G-d mean when he said "go down?" If G-d wanted Moses to leave, it would have sufficed to have said "go!" Obviously, if Moses was to leave Mount Sinai he would have to go

down. Why was it necessary to add the word "down?"

The Talmud, cited by Rashi, seemed to have been addressing this question when it states that G-d was essentially telling Moses that he too was being demoted. In Rashi's words:

> "Is there any other reason I assigned greatness to you, if not for their sake."

Now that the Jews have been degraded, Moses' stature too was diminished. G-d therefore tells Moses "Go down," you have become diminished.

Reish and *Daled:* Similar but Different

On the level of *remez*-hints—where the choice of letters in the Torah itself conveys subliminal messages—the Chassidic work *Igra D'kalah* focuses on the two Hebrew letters of the word *reid* which means "go down." The two letters of the word *reid*, the *reish* and the *daled* are almost identical letters, but they convey opposite meanings.

In the Shema, the Torah exhorts us to affirm the unity of G-d when we declare "G-d is *echad*-one. In another verse the Torah admonishes us not worship other gods. The

word for other is *acher*. Now, these two words—*echad* and *acher*—are spelled the same except for the last letter: The word *echad*-one ends with a *daled*, whereas the word *acher*-other ends with the letter *reish.*

When we look at these two letters, of the word *echad* and the word *acher*, the way they are written in a Torah scroll, we discover that they are written with king size writing, so as to not confuse the two. Imagine the horrible effect it would have if we read the words of the *Shema* with a *reish*. It would have commanded us to believe in other gods, G-d forbid. Likewise, if the verse that commands us to not have other gods would be written with a *daled*, it would suggest that we do not worship the one G-d. To forestall such erroneous distortions of the text, the Torah capitalized these two letters.

Letters Compromised

Thus when G-d tells Moses to descend from the mountain He uses the word *reid*, which implies that these two letters were compromised.

On a simple level, the meaning of this "compromise" is that the letter *reish* which intimates the prohibition against worshipping

"other" gods had been violated, and conversely, the letter *daled* with its connotation of G-d's oneness had also been undermined by creating and worshipping the golden calf.

How do we reconcile this interpretation of the words "go down-*reid*" with the simple meaning that Moses was also diminished by their commission of this terrible sin?

Moses' Primary Role

One can perhaps answer the question by prefacing the primary role of Moses. Moses was not only a liberator and a law-giver. Moses' role was to internalize the people's faith in G-d. Moses is thus referred to as the *raya mehemna*- the faithful shepherd.

In Chassidic literature this appellation has been retranslated as the "shepherd of faith." Just as a shepherd nurtures his flock, so did Moses nurture the Jewish people with spiritual food—faith. When this faith eroded, it reflected a diminution of Moses' position as leader of the people. Or, alternatively, it meant that Moses' was challenged to put more effort in the shepherding of the people—helping them internalize their faith.

Superficial

The difference between faith prior to its being nurtured and internalized and after it is nurtured and internalized is that faith, in and of itself, will not affect behavior.

One can be a thief — the Talmud states — and still have faith in G-d. Moreover, according to the Talmud, a thief may actually utter a silent prayer to G-d as he is about to commit a robbery and break into someone's home. It is not a sign of hypocrisy or insincerity; if he didn't mean it why would the thief pray when no one was around to impress. Rather, it is a sign that faith — that is not nurtured — is a superficial force that does not necessarily change the way we behave.

Moses' role therefore was to help his flock internalize their faith so that it is not fickle and superficial. When they worshipped the golden calf it was a reflection on Moses' need to redouble his efforts at nurturing their faith.

Hence the two interpretations are complementary. Because Moses' role was to nurture their faith — their commitment to the ideals inherent in the letters *reish* and *daled* — and that did not materialize for the worshippers

of the Golden Calf, his stature was therefore diminished.

Poor Letters

There is an even deeper connection understanding of the perversion of the letters *reish* and *daled* based on the subtle differences between these two letters.

Both letters when translated have similar meanings.

Reish and *daled* both have the connotation of poverty. Yet there is a difference between them. A *reish* suggests a person who is bereft of all qualities and virtue, a *daled* is a person who knows his own insignificance.

A story is told of the great Chassidic master, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Horodok who was known for his humility. In fact, he would sign his correspondence with the words "*hashafel be'emes*" which means the "truly lowly" one. When a detractor of Rabbi Mendel saw the reverence people had for him he surmised it was because of the self-effacing way he signed his letters. Envious of his rival he also began to sign his letters with those words. People who

saw his newly discovered humility quipped. "While Rabbi Mendel self-deprecatory sense of lowliness is true and sincere, his rival was truly a lowly person."

The difference between Rabbi Mendel of Horodok and his detractor was the difference between a *daled* and a *reish.*

A *daled* has a little piece—like the Hebrew alphabet's smallest letter *yud*—protruding from the back of the letter, which is absent in a *reish*. This little protrusion is said to symbolize the state of self-abnegation in the face of one's awareness of G-d's greatness. When the Torah speaks of G-d's unity in the words "*Hashem echad*-G-d is one," the *daled* of the word *echad* reminds us of how G-d's unity implies that everything in our lives is an expression of G-d's power. We possess nothing of our own. It's not that we're nothing; it's that G-d is everything.

When one's mindset is one of a *daled*, he or she is so open and receptive, that all of the positive spiritual energies flow into this individual because his or her ego has been removed leaving room for G-d to dwell in their midst.

The *reish*, by contrast, has no *yud* protruding from it. Its impoverishment is not one of

humility and self-abnegation because of a realization of a greater presence in their life, but rather one of emptiness. The *reish* personality is one who is devoid of any of the things that enrich our lives such as knowledge, good personality, piety and other virtues.

The *daled* is the one who is truly humble, while the *reish* personality is the one who is truly a lowly person.

The Modern Version

The story of the Golden Calf is not one of the past. It is one of the present. When we fail to appreciate the value of the *daled* by allowing our egos to clip off the little *yud* behind the *daled* and thereby rendering it a *resih*, we have essentially created a modern day Golden Calf.

This week's Torah reading that deals with the golden calf always occurs in the month of Adar.

The very word Adar contains the *daled* and the *reish* and is preceded by the letter *Aleph*. When one puts the *Aleph*—the awareness of G-d before the *daled* and the *reish*, we are guaranteed that these two letters will not be corrupted and exchanged. Indeed, they combine

to form the word *dar,* which means dwelling and alludes to the idea that the *Aleph,* denoting the one and only Master of the world, will dwell in the world.

Hence the very month of Adar, the month in which we celebrate Purim, is geared to reverse the tragic story of the Golden Calf and to usher in the Messianic Age, at which time the Torah teaches us G-d's presence will be fully revealed in the world—the embodiment of the word Adar.